

Thoughtwell

2017-2018

Edition

Welcome to the 2017-2018 Thoughtwell!

Salem Community High School has always been overflowing with creative talent, and this year's book is the perfect example of that. Coming in at 123 pages, this is the lengthiest Thoughtwell in recent memory. Thanks to moving to a digital distribution format, I'm happy to say we have included everyone's submissions, without having to edit for space.

One of the reasons we've seen such an increase in Thoughtwell submissions is due to the new Creative Class that was offered this year. If you're a student interested in honing their writing skills and getting some experience in various areas of creative writing, I would encourage you to take this class.

This book is divided into three sections: Dramas, Poetry, and Short Fiction. Among all of those, you'll find a variety of topics and themes, from the hilarious to depressing, the thoughtful to horrific. It may be cliché to say there's something for everyone, but if you can't find something you enjoy in this book, you're not looking hard enough.

Sincerely,

Matt Donoho

Thoughtwell Sponsor

Drama

Back in the Apple

By Dustin Jackson

The sun is setting over Clayson, New York, the clouds forming an impenetrable ceiling over the small town. Looking on over the city, James spoke.

James: *(Exhaling after taking a drag from his cigar)* "Nice Night, right?"

Tim: *(Nervously)* "Yeah, now about your money."

James: *(Ominously)* "Oh, right, my money." He takes another drag from the cigar. "Now, tell me, what were you going to tell me about my money?"

Tim: *(Backs up, slightly. His face and palms become sweaty)* "It's all comin' Jimmy, I just need a little more time!" *(Tim's hands shake out of fear.)*

James: "Time's all I've given ya, Tim. Time for this or that hit, time to crack a deal, time to find some way to get me my money!"

Tim: *(He crouches down, as if James was preparing to hit him)*

James: *(He pauses, sighing, visibly restraining himself before continuing. He calmly continues.)* "When will I have my money, Timmy Boy?" *(James approaches)*

Tim: "I don't know, Jimmy, I just need some more time. I've been playing poker for a while, you just, you just never know when you're gonna strike it big."

James: "Ya know, Tim, I actually kind of like you. Which is why it pains me to say it, but that's not good enough." *(Pulls out a shiny, silver revolver and aims it at Tim.)*

James: "My bosses want their money, and if I don't get it to 'em it's my head on the platter! So you're gonna do one of two things. You're gonna do the smart thing, and shake my hand, and tell me you'll have my money by midnight tonight, or you're gonna do the stupid thing, and ask me for more time again. So, what's it gonna be?"

Tim: *(Breaks out into tears.)* "Please, I've got a wife, and two kids!"

James: "Ain't my problem."

Tim: "What're they gonna do without me?"

James: "Look, I don't have all day, bozo. So you gonna give me the money or do I gotta paint

the ground with your brains!?" *(Shakes the gun for emphasis.)*

Tim: *(Getting on his knees, begging.)* "Fine, fine! I'll do anything!"

James: *(Smiles. Slides the gun back into his coat.)* "I thought you'd start to see things my way. Tonight. Here. Midnight. These terms agreeable?"

Tim: *(Breathing heavily, trying to regain composure.)* "Do I gotta choice?"

James: *(Matter of factly.)* "No." *(Extends a hand to Tim, as if for a handshake.)*

Tim: *(Stares at the hand.)*

James: "We gotta shake, Timmy Boy."

Tim: *(Reluctantly takes Jimmy's hand and shakes.)*

James: "Good choice. I gotta split. Don't think of tryin' to run. If ya do, I'll find ya, and you'll wish to God you hadn't." *(Releases Tim's hand and turns to walk back to his car.)*

Tim: *(Desperately charges at Jimmy with his back turned, knowing he would never be able to come up with the money.)*

James: *(Sensing this move, pulls the gun out of his coat pocket and fires three shots into Tim.)*

Tim: *(Falls to his knees.)*

James: "Dammit Tim, you shouldn't have gone and done that! Now," *(He kneels, meeting Tim at eye level.)*

James: "We're gonna have to get the money you owe us somehow. You're family's gonna wish you hadn't screwed with us."

Tim: "Please, leave them outta this!"

James: "Should've thought about that, Timmy Boy." *(Pulls out revolver, aims it at Tim's head. Fires. Walks away.)*

Hailey Wimberly
Creative Writing
Mr. Donoho
One Act Play

Characters:

- Mr. Calvin- Alli Baer
- Mrs. Calvin- Chloe Phillips
- Aunt Kara- Gill McLean
- Adeline- Christina Wescher
- Dixon- Dustin Jackson
- Servant- Myself
- Chanel (family pet)

The Treat

Scene: The chic dining room table has just been cleared by the servants of the Calvin family. Eight chairs sat around the dark wood table that is contrast the the white walls. Family photos linger here and there, even the occasional beloved dog photo appears. Marble steps lead up to the spacious room with only the dining table and the lavish crystal chandelier. A single swinging door is on the right back wall leading to the kitchen.

Dixon (*walking poiseily in the center of the stairs *back of stage**): SERVANT

Servant (*popping in from the door*): Yes

Dixon (*clearing throat*): Uh-huh

Servant: Yes Mr. Dixon

Dixon (*one side upturning into smirk*): Better, better (*now walking straight to the head stage right of the table and sitting in the seat*)

Servant (*hunched over arms close to chest, trying to stay closer to the door*): What can I do for you Mr. Dixon?

Dixon (*propping up legs*): Fetch the silver platter with plate cover now
(servant heads backs out left of stage through door)

Dixon: FAMILY..... O' FAMILY, GET IN HERE NOWWWWWWWWWWWWW!

(family bustling in from back stage)

(Aunt Kara following the rest and slipping up the stairs)

Mr. Calvin *(stern set look upon his face)*: What in the heck is going on Dixon

(In walks servant with platter dish setting on the center of table, and heading out left of stage out the door once more)

(Family looks now turn quizzical)

Dixon *(full on smirk now)*: Please sit, I have prepared a treat for all of you

(Mrs. Calvin now face softens, while Adeline remains quizzical, Aunt Kara indifferent blank stare, and Mr. Calvin stern once more)

Mr. Calvin *(walking backstage right to the head of table toward Dixon)*: Well, can I have my seat then son?

Dixon *(sweet demanding in his voice)*: Awwwwww see now I was thinking I might be able sit here

(Looking toward Mrs. Calvin)

Mrs. Calvin *(headed towards table now to the seat right of head)*: It's just dessert darling this one time come sit, it's of course his treat to us....

(Mr. Calvin face set still, shaking his head takes his seat left of Dixon, now across from Mrs. Calvin)

Mr. Calvin *(looking him in the eyes)* Well remove your feet from my table. You're not the man of this house.

(for just a split second there was a stand off and with Dixon's twitch of the eye, removes his feet slowly)

Adeline *(walking stage right to sit next to Mr. Calvin, crossing arms)*: Well if the argument is over of who can sit in a stupid chair, or is "head hunch" *(making air quotes)*, or who can pee the farthest is over can we get to what the heck treat you have for us.

Dixon (*clapping hands together*): Yessss yes yes of course.

Adeline: hold on-

Dixon (*pounding fist, voice growing aggravated to a upset child*): WHATTT, NOW

Adeline (*rolling eyes, all but used to his pointless outbursts*): I was going to say maybe you've all noticed were not all here (arm extending to point towards Aunt Kara who is standing zone out)

Adeline : Looks like she is using again

Mrs. Calvin (*concerned tone in voice*): Kara (*Kara still zoned*) Krrrrraaaa (*realization coming into face*)

Kara (*looking at the rest of the family*): Oh sorry I bumped my head falling on the steps (*now coming to right of head next to Mrs. Calvin to sit*)

Adeline (*little chuckle*): Sureeee that's what it is (*cueing Kara to wipe off under her nose*)

Dixon (*now extremely annoyed*): Hellllloooo can we get back to why all of you are here

Mr. Calvin (*still aggravated over the seat*): Please do son

Dixon (*saying matter-a-factly*): Well as you all know my trust fund kicked in last week and I've been meaning to move out for a while now

Mrs. Calvin (*worried look*): Oh honey you don't have to to that

Adeline (*nodding with a smile*): Finally, yes mom he does. Now I don't have to deal with your psychotic behavior, none of us do

Mr. Calvin and Mrs. Calvin (*in unison*): Adeline!

Adeline (*shocked*): Now come on guys you know he is. You're just either too scared to face the truth, or you're okay with it because it's not people he's killed yet.

Mr. Calvin (*voice raised*): Adeline. Enough.

Adeline (*sarcasm with a hint of hysteria*): My bad you perfect little baby boy can do no wrong. You really think he's sane? I mean look at him right now.

(Dixon is now shaking, head ticking a little)

Mrs. Calvin *(losing composure, voice yelling with sadness)*: Adeline for crying out loud stop it.

(for of the family knew if Dixon lost composure himself he'd going into a raging tantrum)

Adeline *(shaking head with disbelief)*: Whatever, you guys have known something's wrong with him for a long time, someone was bound to say it

Dixon *(shaking still)*: Is this true you've all thought I'm crazy *(looking from person to person)*

(No one taking notice in the zoned, zombie state of Aunt Kara)

Mr. Calvin *(blank look)*: You're grown man now so what you choose to do is what you choose to do. We're done covering for you. You've got your trust fund.

Mrs. Calvin *(dumbfounded)*: Richard. What are you saying?

Mr. Calvin: come on Lisa, I'm not saying I don't love him but he killed all of the neighbors animals.

Adeline: Finally you're bringing it up *(mocking clapping)*

Mrs. Calvin *(turning her head)*: He got counseling for that. He said he was sorry.

Adeline: Wow okay so if I purposely strangle and stab people and keep a draw full of their necklaces as souvenirs and say "sorry" it's okay... And because he went to what 3 appointments he's cured from his sadistic tendencies... He's a BTK in the making and I'm just so glad he's moving the heck out before he kills Chanel.

(Silence lingers for 5 seconds)

Dixon *(all of a sudden weirdly stops shaking)*: Okay, okay so now you finally told me to my face. *(eyes now only focusing on the silver platter)*

Mrs. Calvin *(worrying look, touching his shoulder)*: Are you okay, honey?

Dixon *(smile forming)*: Of course, but are you going to be?

(Mrs. Calvin hand falling from his shoulder, looking around the table in worried/concerned look)

Mr. Calvin *(questioning tone)*: What do you mean Dixon...

Dixon *(blank eyes and still eyes fixated on the platter)*: I know you all couldn't wait for me to be gone and I've heard both you mom and dad talk about me... Adeline i mean at least you're upfront with your feelings I.. admire that in you *(creepy smile appearing)* ,but our family's not perfect, dad you cheat on mom and mom you're a shopaholic, and Aunt Kara she does coke

Mrs Calvin *(finally giving up on not expressing how she feels)*: It's not that we don't love you sweetie, it's just people talk and we just thought maybe getting you some help would benefit us all...

Dixon *(shaking his head)*: See I thought you might say something like that, so that's why I've made arrangements to move overseas

Adeline *(sarcastic)*: Gee what a shame

Mrs. Calvin *(sadness in her voice)*: You don't have to. Just hear us out Dixon, we love you, we only want to help

Dixon *(sliding the chair back and standing up)*: You see I don't need help I do nothing wrong, it's the animals they just have bad energy and the way they look at me *(shaking head)*, I don't want to kill them, I really don't

Adeline *(disgusted)*: You've got to be a complete and utter creep, counseling won't do you any good, you need shock therapy

Dixon *(smiling and walking right of table towards stairs)*: Well I must be going, my treat well is a parting gift to remember me by.

(Dixon heads towards the door with a sinister look in his eye and he opens the front door and leaves)

Mrs. Calvin *(frantic)*: Richard go after him

Mr. Calvin: Let him go

Adeline *(standing up to go to platter)*: Mine as well and see the so called treat

(She lifts up the lid.....inside is the beloved Chanel with her collar missing and a treat stuffed in her mouth..... Dead)

Adeline *(eyes popping out)*: I think I'm going to be sick (runs out the door)

(Mrs. Calvin is escorted out by Mr. Calvin with her hand to her mouth)

Mr. Calvin *(yelling to the staff)*: Someone get the dog off the table and out of the house

(Aunt Kara being zoned out the whole time no one noticing, wakes up)

Aunt Kara *(jumbled words)*: Where is everyone a- *(seeing Chanel)*
What the- *(passes out)*

Gillian McLean
Mr. Donoho
Creative Writing
07 December 2017

Grace Horton as Natalia Arrington
Austyn Dodson as Christian Kingsley
Dylan Shuell as Marcus Kingsley
Creed Phillips as Aiden Lockwood
Anna Alli as Keatyn Kensington
Hailey Wimberley as Nevaeh Bellamy
Narrated by Cheyenne Jerrell

Of Wine and Death

Scene. *The airy, opulent gathering hall tucked carefully away within **Natalia Arrington's** cavernous estate. To the left stands the entrance to a wide hall, marble floors trailing deeper into the massive home. To the right sits a lengthy serving table, teeming with hors d'oeuvres and champagne. Along the rear wall strands of pure, white light dangle gracefully from the twelve-foot ceilings. The front wall is composed entirely of glass, and guests are able to see an extravagant patio overlooking an expansive vineyard. It is New Year's Eve, many comrades and acquaintances of **Natalia** have gathered for a celebration of their year together. **Natalia** is the sole inheritor of the Arrington fortune- a fortune built from unspeakable acts- and now possesses the largest wine label in all of Europe. The hall is littered with guests, laughing in a facile manner and dancing about the floor. **Christian** and **Marcus Kingsley** strut through the hall, stopping to converse with **Aiden Lockwood**- a long time friend. The **Kingsley's** are young men that possess prominent power in France's business world, **Lockwood** is a world renowned football player. **Nevaeh Bellamy** sits perched upon a barstool, deeply enthralled by a conversation with **Keatyn Kensington**. Both girls could be described as faultless- models for foreign luxury brands- but seemingly suspicious. Bent effortlessly against a massive column, **Natalia** observes the party with a peculiarly stoic expression.*

***Nevaeh Bellamy** (glancing furtively around the large hall) I don't know, I could be wrong, it's only an assumption. But I did overhear one of the women backstage the other day, and it would make sense as to why Natalia's been acting so.. strange.*

***Keatyn Kensington** (eyes darting in Natalia's direction, she notes that Natalia is retreating down the hall) So, you think she's already heard about it then?*

Nevaeh Bellamy (*shrugging her shoulders*) It's definitely possible. You know how she is, she has ears everywhere.

Keatyn Kensington I hope, for Aiden's sake, that you're wrong. I don't even want to think of how furious Natalia would be if she heard rumors about him, let alone if they held any weight of truth.

Nevaeh Bellamy (*grinning mischievously*) Well, let's pray that Aiden hasn't lost his mind then. Don't look now, but, Marcus is heading this direction.

Marcus Kingsley (*laughing boisterously, gesturing around the room with wide arms*) Hey, ladies, enjoying the festivities?

Nevaeh Bellamy (*smirking ruefully*) Enjoying might be a bit of a stretch, but it's quite the get together. Have you seen Natalia at all yet?

Marcus Kingsley Come to think of it, no. Don't stress though, knowing her, she's probably lurking about somewhere.

Keatyn Kensington (*shivering mildly*) Ugh, can you not use Nat's name and the word 'lurking' in the same sentence, Marcus? She's intimidating enough as it is.

Marcus Kingsley (*smiling amusedly*) Lighten up, Keats, it was only a joke. Aiden and Christian went to go look for her a few minutes ago. Speak of the devil, here comes Christian.

Nevaeh Bellamy (*breaking out in a warm smile at the sight of Christian*) Hey, stranger. Where have you been all night?

Christian Kingsley (*shrugging uninterestedly*) Around. Aiden ditched me for Nat, said they needed to talk.

(*Nevaeh and Keatyn share a knowing look, trying to decide if they should enlighten the guys as to what they think they may know of Aiden's fidelity*)

Nevaeh Bellamy (*clearing her throat too conspicuously*) Ah, I see.. Well, I, uh, need to visit the restroom. Care to join me, Keats?

Keatyn Kensington (*with a perplexed expression, but still raising from her seat out of intrigue*) Of course. Let's not get ourselves lost on the way there though, hm?

Nevaeh Bellamy (*Bellamy laughs easily, winking at the guys as they depart, and then checking over her shoulder to make sure the two stay put. In a low voice she says...*) Keats, I'm worried, we need to find Natalia. If she wants to disappear from her biggest event of the year to talk to Aiden, it must be pretty grave- you know how she adores these things. Hell, she's spent months with the planners getting everything prepared for tonight. Do you think maybe everything I heard from the other models could be true?

Keatyn Kensington Just breathe, Vay. I'm sure it's nothing too severe. Let's not get ourselves worked up and end up doing anything drastic. Look, we'll find her right now and talk. We can see what she's heard, if anything, and let her in on the gossip from the studio- alright?

Nevaeh Bellamy (*nodding vigorously*) You're absolutely right, I'm only getting ahead of myself on this. I mean, why am I so anxious? (*she chuckles nervously*) What was I thinking? That she would castrate him?

Keatyn Kensington (*laughing heavily*) Well, maybe nothing quite that terrifying. (*pausing at the look on Nevaeh's face*) I'm teasing! Relax. Come on, let's get to the restroom already, we've been gone for ages. The guys are probably starting to think that we've fallen in.

(*The girls round the corner at the end of the long, silent hall. Keatyn pushes open the door to the powder room and shoots an exceptionally anxious, wide eyed look over her shoulder at Nevaeh*)

Natalia Arrington (*arms braced against the counter on either side of her, hands shaking unsteadily, head bent forward as if it is unbearably heavy*) This bathroom is already occupied, if you couldn't tell.

Keatyn Kensington (*approaching Natalia slowly, speaking in a low and gentle tone*) It's only us, Nat. We noticed you'd been M.I.A. all night and became worried, so we came to look for you.

Natalia Arrington (*chuckling bitterly*) Well isn't that rich? Did the two of you expect an award for being such compassionate girlfriends?

Keatyn Kensington (*exchanging a nervous and somewhat abashed look with Nevaeh*) Um.. no. We were genuinely concerned, Nat. We've been friends for ages, we don't have any sudden personal agenda. You were just worrying us, that's all. But... if you're- okay? We can go, if you'd like.

Nevaeh Bellamy (*speaking suddenly and with urgency*) Natalia, you seem really.. upset. Did you hear anything- oh, I don't know- shocking? You can tell us, you know. We're here to help you..

Natalia Arrington (*finally looking up to stare at the girls in the mirror, her large brown eyes are bloodshot and glossy*) Aiden. He- he.. slept with a model from Marseille... (*spinning around abruptly to face the girls*) I didn't know what to do! My blood.. I honest to God think that, for a moment, it boiled. I- I need your help. I wasn't thinking; it was completely out of impulse- I swear!

(*Nevaeh's eyes widen considerably and the color drains from her face, she looks faint. Keatyn stands, staring at Natalia with an expression devoid of any emotion at all- presumably out of shock.*)

Keatyn Kensington (*slowly, and in a monotonous voice*) I.. don't know that I'm understanding you. What *exactly* are you trying to tell us right now, Natalia?

Nevaeh Bellamy (*in a terrified whisper*) Oh God. She killed him, Keatyn... I guarantee she did. (*voice breaking*) Oh God, why, Nat?

Natalia Arrington (*lifting her hands helplessly, pleading with the girls for understanding*) I thought when he told me I was it- that I really was. I was so foolish. Please... just help me.

Keatyn Kensington (*with an expression of stone*) Are you admitting to it? Did you really murder him? (*seeing tears streak down Natalia's face*) Oh, Nat- get up, come on. We'll take care of this, alright?

(*Keatyn looks to Nevaeh for reassurance. Nevaeh's eyes swim in her head and, for a moment, her body teeters precariously. Before Keatyn can register what's happening, Nevaeh falls to the floor in a heap- an audible thud echoing throughout the room. Natalia begins to sob violently.*)

Keatyn Kensington *(in a willful voice, grabbing Natalia's face)* Listen to me, Natalia! You will not cave now. No, you're going to clean up your mess. Understand me?

(Keatyn coerces Natalia into standing, and together the two hoist up Nevaeh's slight frame. They take her to a room across the hall and lay her in a bed. Natalia leads Keatyn deeper into the large mansion and opens a heavy, wooden door- allowing Keatyn to enter ahead of her.)

Natalia Arrington *(in a malicious voice)* Convenient that the models all neglected to tell Nevaeh that you're the one she slept with Aiden, isn't it? *(laughing amusedly)* And I bet that you've thought you were in the clear this entire time, hm? That's what's really rich. Well, unfortunately, bloodlust runs in the family... As if I'd ever need help covering up my trail.

(Keatyn's eyes widen knowingly, and she stands still- as if she were a deer in front of headlights. She backs up against the wall, but Natalia gets closer and closer. Keatyn pleads with her, but Natalia continues to close in on her. Natalia reaches out quickly and strikes Keatyn's temple with a nearby paperweight.)

End scene.

Script written and edited by

Gillian McLean

Poetry

Autumn

The sun shining while the sharp air blows, whistling its tune that makes the leaves down and dance to.

Walking on the sunshine-laden sidewalk, path, road, or parking lot and stepping on a crisp, amber leaf that has done its dance and now lays to rest, but it only tosses and turns as soon as the wind sings again.

Entering a pleasantly warm home that smells of the season-- a pie in the oven, hot apple cider or tea boiling on the stove, a candle flickering on the kitchen table and spreading its aromatic message that Autumn has arrived, and it has wriggled its way through the front door and into the house.

Wrapping myself in a cozy, wool-knit sweater and a hat, thermos in hand on my way to a bonfire, hayride, pumpkin patch, craft festival, farmer's market, or orchard-- trekking my way through the leaf-cluttered drive.

The most beautiful season-- vibrant yellows and shades of scarlet are painted across the treetops. The air smells fresh and cool; it finally is no longer suffocated by the sweltering humidity of summer that once held the breeze in a chokehold.

At last, it is Autumn.

The wind can sing her melody, and the trees can shake to the rhythmic hum of the air.

The leaves can wonder, no longer bound to their branches-- free to explore the trails of any wood, park, or path they choose.

Fall is in the air-- introverted hearts can breathe a sigh of relief as we can sit inside or outside in solitude, marveling at the beauty of the world around us, while still enjoying a comforting kind of company of our good friend Autumn.

- Grace Horton

I said it quietly, "I give you my love."
My words escape without a thought
And you flee quickly like a dove
I did not realize you love me not
Our lips moved like dancing flames
I only didn't think about how they burned
My heart told me not to trust your name
But I did not hear it till away you turned
Sweet sorrow is now my dear friend
I wait for your call at night, just one call
I will love you until the bitter end
Who would have thought I could feel so small?
Away you turned, away with my heart
Perhaps it is possible to live without that small part.

-Madison Alvis

This feeling that I feel, can be no other but love

It's more addicting than any drug

My goal is to always put him high above

I can tell he does with every hug

He carries my heart with a strong hold

Even through every fight

For I hope he is the one, until we are old

Because this just feels so right

On a rainy day, he is my sun

On a cold day, he makes me warm

When I am bored he is my fun

He will always protect me through every storm

For he has helped me see

Who I am truly suppose to be

By: Shelbi Thomason

MY NAME IS BLANK

MY NAME IS BLANK,
I HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS.
CHEMICAL IMBALANCES IF YOU MUST.
I BRUSH MY TEETH TILL MY GUMS BLEED.
THEY DON'T FEEL CLEAN IF I DON'T,
I HAVE OCD.
MY NAME IS BLANK.
I'M SORRY, DID I ALREADY SAY THAT?
I SAW SOMETHING AND GOT DISTRACTED,
I HAVE ADD.
WHY DID I SEEM NERVOUS AND APOLOGIZE?
I THOUGHT YOU'D MAKE FUN OF ME,
I HAVE ANXIETY.
I SEE YOU STARING AT MY SCARS,
I HAVE MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER AND SEASONAL DEPRESSION.
I'M SORRY I SEEMED SO ANXIOUS AT THE MOVIE THEATER AND MALL.
I THOUGHT SOMETHING BAD WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME.
I ALWAYS FEEL LIKE THAT IN PUBLIC PLACES,
I HAVE PARANOIA.
CAN YOU REPEAT THAT?
I PROMISE I WASN'T IGNORING YOU.
NO I WASN'T DAYDREAMING EITHER.
WHEN I'M EXTREMELY STRESSED I SOMETIMES HEAR VOICES.
I WAS TRYING TO BLOCK THEM OUT.
I KNOW I PUSHED YOU AWAY AND OVERREACTED.
I DO THAT TO EVERYONE,
I HAVE BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER.
MY NAME IS BLANK.
I HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS.
CHEMICAL IMBALANCES IF YOU MUST.

-HOLDYN KERSHAW

Inspiration

Inspiration, is hard to come by, sometimes you have to search for it. Don't pass it up, it's playing hide and seek. Look hard, or else it might be lost to those who seek wonderful thoughts. Maybe the roles are reversed and it will find you. Don't hide, get in plain sight, or else it won't see you. If it does it will bless you with the gift of encouragement, and let you ride out on the train of thought till it stops somewhere mysterious. You might think: "Will you like it or will you keep going on?" Till you get to the end of the line and it helps you write the best paper Ever!

-Drake Lance-

My Mind is Elsewhere

My mind is elsewhere,
My body may be here,
but my mind is nowhere near,
Fighting demons,
Losing battles,
Storming castles.

My mind is elsewhere,
Please don't go,
Just know,
I'm fighting in a losing war,
As my mind is becoming torn
By a very large thorn.

My mind is wanting to be elsewhere.
I am cursed with losing
But i can't stop myself from pursuing,
These mad ideas and insane dreams.
My dreams are fleeting,
As I realize that I am not able
To obtain these ideas from a fable.

My mind is nowhere.
I have been lost,
But not without a cost.
I will not be remembered for being amazing,
But for gazing
Out the window, not paying attention
Trying to lower the tension,
Until I am dead.
I wish not to be forgotten,
May my footprint be retained for the ideas that I have begotten.

I will not be lost.
I will make an impact
To counteract the cost
Of doing nothing.

I want to help wherever I can,
For I know it is not God's plan
For me to do nothing.

My mind may be elsewhere,
But remember that I am searching
For a purpose unbeknownst to me.
This is a note for me,
To help me remember to be remembered,
For anything but staring longingly at the window.
I don't know,
I can't see what is in the future,
But I better be ready for whatever comes.

-Payne Barbee-

The Rose In the Black

*Worn sails travel the dark forest.
The crew of the ship as equally worn
As the ship's sail depicting rose and thorn.
The ship weaves through the forest.
The trees are tainted black by a flame of unspeakable power.
The sails turn black, the taint creeping towards the flower.
They say that deep in the heart of the forest
The fire still burns and heats the sap, whistling in terrible chorus.
The inhabitants of this wood
Have fled for good.
No life will return here.
The fire consumes anything that comes near.
The fire will consume everything, including the flower's crew.
What they were heading to, the crew never knew.*

*The captain strolls around the ship, coat drenched in dew,
Peering into the forest they were sailing through.
Off to the starboard side he spotted a light,
A hint of orange against the black, looking like a blight.
He tore off his coat, tossing dew on a few
Of the half-dead, worn-out, emotionless crew.
The captain called out loud,
He was so very proud,
To have found the Eternal Fire.
He grabbed hold of the wheel
And steered toward the fire, still consuming its meal.
The captain was enthralled by the flame,
Practically filling his frame.*

*The captain called to lower the masts,
The cloth unfurled by the crew of ghosts.*

Lurching forward, the ship gained ground,
Speeding towards the flames like a hound.
The fire danced violently
The flames shuddered over the carcass of a tree
The fire raged and roared
It started licking at the ship's boards.
In the heart of the fire,
The captain saw the figure of something higher.
The figure spread its arms
The crew started raising the alarms.
"Captain! We're getting too close!"
The Captain couldn't hear,
The being in the fire was whispering in his ear.
The flame enticed him to come near,
Crewmembers watched in fear,
As the captain walked past
And stopped at the mast.

"We did it boys, we're finally here."
The captain muttered
As the boards cracked and sputtered
Flames crawled aboard,
Blackening every board.
The crew gathered together,
Ashes fall from one hat's feather.
Terrified, some of the men scream,
But the fire was the captain's dream.
The captain brought the crew as a sacrifice
To the being, he hoped they would suffice.
He wanted the being's power,
Enough to make men cower.
The being brought him closer to the fire,
When the mast, tall as a spire

*Came crashing down,
Flipping the ship, and caused men in the flame to drown.*

*The being saved the captain,
Flying over the fire like a falcon.
The being filled him with its light,
But no matter his might,
The captain couldn't contain,
His mission in vain,
The light broke through him,
Flashing the forest with the light of the grim.
And so ended the voyage of the ship of the rose.*

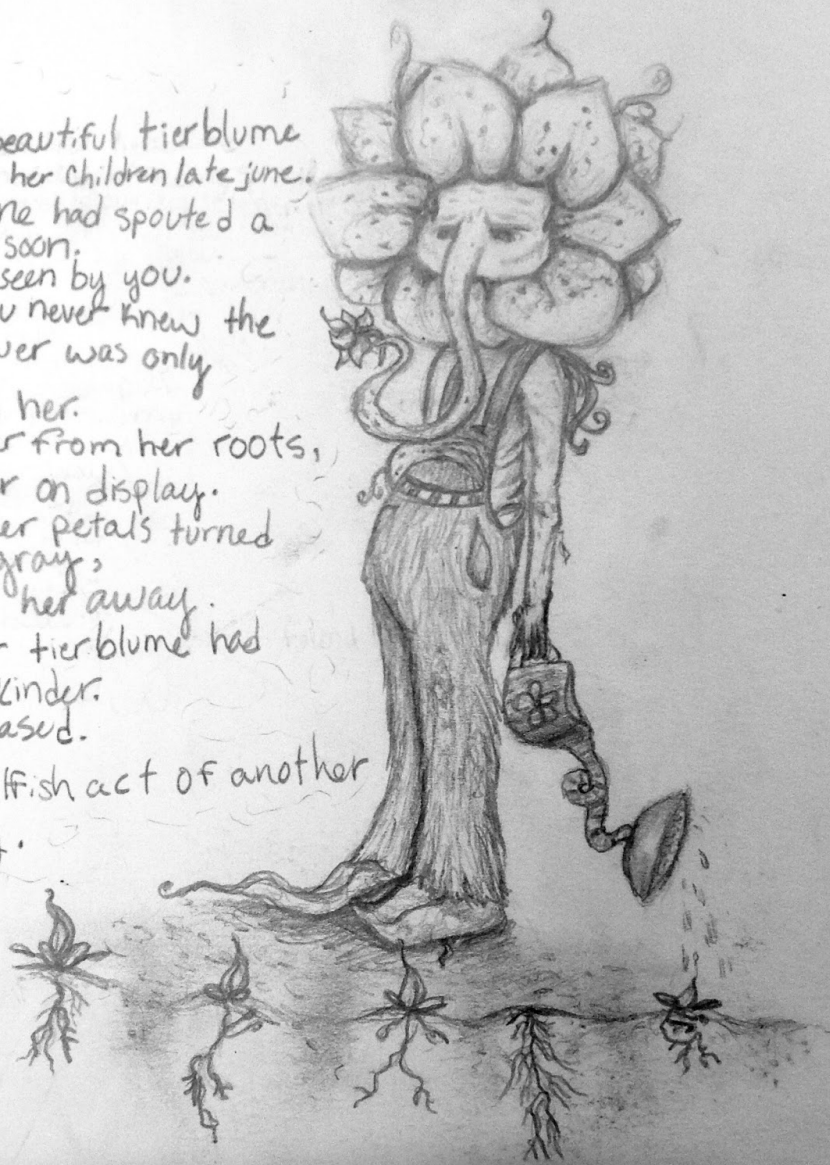
-Payne Barbee-

Relax

*Smile and let it all out-
Push away all the doubt-
It's your time to break out-
Take your fear - lock it out-
You got this*

By: Bianca Devor

For the beautiful tierblume
Had soiled her children late june.
but for one had spouted a
little too soon,
and was seen by you.
Though you never knew the
vibrant flower was only
a kinder,
you picked her.
You tore her from her roots,
And put her on display.
But when her petals turned
dead and gray,
you threw her away.
The mother tierblume had
found her kinder.
Laying deceased.
From the selfish act of another
For beauty.



By: Kyla Schroeter

months later you'll realize what you did
you suddenly understand why I was so broken and why it took me a lifetime to build myself back
together piece by piece
you'll figure out why my tear stained face cannot meet your inquiring glance and you'll feel your
heart drop into your stomach
when you see my shaking hands reach for the door because I can't be in the same room as you

it never made sense to you
until now

you catch yourself staring blankly at my empty seat as the guilt overwhelms you
you decide to end things with your new lover
and when they ask for an explanation you say that your heart belongs to someone else
you sit in your driveway blaring the music so loud that it blocks out your thoughts but the
pounding bass isn't what shattered your heart

you finally know what it feels like to be completely broken and every single memory comes
flooding back into your mind and that's when a tsunami of tears come pouring out and your
trembling fingers dial my number and you hope to hear my voice but all you are left with is, "at
the tone please record your message."

By: Jennifer Hays

Sad Poems for Sad People

I Grew a Tree Today

I grew a tree today
A little tree, I say
And when this tree grows bigger
On it I will play

I'll grab a little rope
And tie it to a branch
And when I take a little swing
I hope I do not cranch

As the tree grows and grows
And the rope will get much higher
I won't be able to swing as much
So I will add a tire

And as the tire grows too small
For my growing self
I'll add a little tree house
With windows and a shelf

And as I grow too old
To climb those larger trees
I'll lay myself against the trunk
And there I'll rest in peace.

Spots

I love my little puppy
I think I'll name him Spots
I'll play with him and hug him so
He knows I love him lots

I love my little puppy
He likes to run around
But sometimes I can't find him
Rarely can't he be found

I loved my little puppy

I loved my little Spots
But now my little Spots is gone
And in the ground he rots.

Charles

I met a man named Charles
Charles Applebean
And of all the people I have met
He's the strangest that I've seen

Charles was a portly man
And almost eight foot two
His head the size of a beach ball
And his hair was colored blue

Charles liked to sing a lot
A one man gospel choir
And one night he sang so high
His house had caught on fire

Charles sang a note so tall
The glass of a lantern broke
It fell onto his wooden floor
And his house was caught in smoke

Now of all the things I've told to you
Of Charles, I must say
The strangest out of all of them
Was the lantern in modern day

By: Mason LeMarr

The Lonely Walk Through Life



By Kaidlen Bullard

I wrote this book full of poems to express how I felt going through my Freshman year in high school. It's really harder than most people think. You start out with all these new friends you think you can trust, then you wake up the next day and they're telling everyone your secrets. You can't do what high schoolers do in movies. *(it's not that easy, teachers aren't that lenient)* Most teachers are really nice if you met their good side. So here comes the confusing life of a young Freshman girl.

I Remember When

I remember the time
When all was fine.
We were happy
And not as snappy

Everything was easy then
But it had only just began
Love was in the air
But we didn't know it was there

Now we're in two different places
And we can't see each other's faces.
It's not easy to be alone and know
That someone loves you.

I wish it was simple
But now I feel even more cripple.
I've fallen for you so many times
It should become a crime.

My heart's been broken
But now I've spoken.
My words are true
And so is my love for you.

Not Enough

When you be honest
You should feel like a goddess
You don't lie
But it don't fly

There's always a but
And I'm tired of trying
Tired of trying to crack the nut

Now I'm lying here wondering
Was this not enough?
Was it taken a little too rough?

People say they want the truth
But they drop on top of you like a roof.
It's never enough proof.

I try,try, try
But then I have to lie, lie, lie.
Lie that I'm happy and lie that I'm sad
Because deep down I don't have the feelings I once had.

It pushes you to a limit.
It crushes you in a minute.
But most of all it changes you
and you thought it couldn't.

For better or for worse?
We'll never know
But soon it will show.
So how will you know?

You

I feel I'm rushing this all in
And I feel I'm gonna do it again.
I feel I'm gonna hurt myself

You make me feel like I'm wanted
You tell me the truth even though I don't believe it
And if I could only really see it

You telling me I'm beautiful
All I do is laugh
But now I feel so grateful
For all the things I truly have

I realized I'm wrong about myself
And I thank you for the help.
Your so sweet and kind
And your supper freaking fine

I'm so happy,
Even though I might seem a bit snappy
I'm so glad I can call you mine.

Where's the Difference?

If all pigs are pink
If all turtles are green
If all whales are blue,
And all sheep are black or white
Then why don't we all look alike?

We all are different
In our own kind of way,
But why is it so hard to just say "Hey"?

We all laugh
We all cry
But in the end
All it seems is that
We only know how to say "Goodbye"

We all have feelings that bend,
We all have our own way to blend,
But why is it so hard to just make one friend?

We all know life is hard
We all know it's just like driving a car,
If you don't pay attention it all will fall.
So where's the difference in this all?

We can be short,
Or we can be tall.
But I still don't see the difference in us all.

We all have our own way of looking at things
So most think it's hard to fly with one wing.
And only most can sing.

But everyone has a talent.
The Elephant trainer trains elephants,
The lion trainer trains lions,
The singer sings,
The dancer dances,
The painter paints,
The drawer draws,
And the writer writes.

But If the copier copies,
If the printer prints,
If the sharpener sharpens,
And if the eraser erases.
The why is it so hard to put ourselves in these places?

We've all paced from door to door.
And we've all walked from floor to floor.
And we've all done some kind of chore.

So I ask again.
Where's the difference?
Is it our skin?
Is it our hair?
Is it our eyes?
Or is it our minds?

To me we all look alike.
To me we all act alike.
To me we all just want to fight.

Why don't we stop fighting and start fighting?
Why don't we stop and look at those little moments in life?
Why don't we cherish anything?
Why don't we love one another like ourselves?

We are all so stuck with picking out the difference.
Let's be stuck picking out the similarities.
Life is too short to worry about the negativity.
So stop and think positively.

So if the copier will copy
If the printer will print,
If the sharpener will sharpen,
And the eraser will erase,
Then why are we still stuck in this place?

When life gets rough

You have to stay tough
If your not well
Then Who is?

We push yourself, thinking
There's only one thing for us
And that is breathing

There is so much more to life
And the turns could be as sharp as a knife
But at least you could say
I made it through another rough day.

You could say you lived life to its fullest
Or that people think you're the coolest
Your kids would exist
And you would be missed

Never joke about being down
And never run to new towns
Runnings only gonna make it harder

So stay and fight whatever is hurting you
And maybe you'll make others believe too.
Believe that there's more to life
And that you have to take those corners
That are as sharp as a knife.

If I hurt you then you hurt me too!

People always wonder why I think you're so fine
Maybe it's the fact that I could call you mine
You made me shine like a sun on a hot day
And now everything isn't fine.

All the smiles are whipped off my face
And lie here in big disgrace
I wonder what I did wrong
Because I thought we were strong.

My heart is lying on the floor
In bits and pieces
Plus many more.

Why is this happening?
Is it for real,
Because I cannot feel.

I can't feel my heart beating anymore
And there's nothing left to adore.
I wish we could've been even more
But now I lay on this nasty shore.

A shore not by a sea full of salt water
No a shore by sea full of tear water
I didn't just cry the river
I made a sea.

I cried so long that there's nothing left
Why is this so hard to do
All I wanted to hear was, "I love you too"

The words you said stole my breath
And my heart felt a little heft.
My mouth turned dry
And I started to cry

I haven't cried so much since my brother passed
But I knew deep down we wouldn't last.
I was hoping for a lot of joy
But instead I became really coy.

I wanna lock myself in a nice dark room
And pretend there's nobody but me and the man on the moon
I wanna listen to that song reminds me of you
Just so I can cry and not see the sky too

I can't speak without tears
It's like I just bit a sour pear.
Everything looks nice on the outside
But deep down I'm not even on the inside

I'm in a different world
Where everything is nice and simple
And I can't turn very cripple.
Everything is perfect
And not so wordless

But then I come back to the real world
And realize I'm lying on the floor
With tears rolling down my face
And I'm still sitting in big disgrace

So I'm sorry if I hurt you
But you hurt me too
Hell all I wanted to do was speak about you

Being Loved

When the sun rises,
And the sunsets,
Two people have met.

They've laughed
They've cried
They could've even said goodbye.

Nothing is more beautiful
Than being loved.
Whether it be great full,
Or it be dreadful,
Nothing's better than being loved.

Life has its own course,
But I promise it's harder than riding a horse.
Yes it a big roller coaster,
But that's better than being a lonely toaster.

Everyone is beautiful,
In their own kind of way.
But only the ones who believed,
Can be loved in many ways.

What did I do wrong?

You lied to me like it was nothing
But it hurt like it was something.
I can't cry because I'm too weak
And now I wish I was able to sleep.

I'm sitting in the dark
Thinking about how it feels like I've been bite by a shark
I'm lost in thought about you
And why you always said "I love you too"

Why would you say that unless you loved me
But instead of loving me you just shoved me
You shoved off the cliff
That was keeping me stiff

Now I'm at the bottom
While your at the top yelling "ha got'em"
You think I'm ok but really I'm not
Now I always feel like I'm shot

I feel like my body got turn inside out
And no I can't even shout
I wanna scream and let it out
But all I feel come out is doubt

Doubt about myself
Doubt about you
Doubt about everything
Doubt about everyone

My life went from happy and stress full
To straight up depressed and dreadful
Why did you do this to me
Am I just part of that really meme?

Everyone laughs at me
No one ever cries
And when I cry they don't shed a tear
Why do they always say they'll always be near?

They're really far out of reach
And I can barely screech.
I can't scream out their name
Oh man this is such a shame.

I told myself I'd be strong
And I've even done myself wrong
Is this what it is?
I'm just that mistaken sin?

Everyone thinks I'm perfect but I'm not
And everyone lies and tells me I'm hot
But do they mean it really
I'm so done with these feelings

I want to give a special shout out to Mrs. Russell, and Mr. Boles at Salem Community High School for always helping me through my rough times. Thank you Mr. Boles for high fiving me everyday, it really makes my day brighter than it really is. Thank you Mrs. Russell for helping me understand things through a different point-of-view.

I wanna give a great thank you to Carlee Jones. You are always so truthful to me. You're never scared to tell me something to my face instead of behind my back. So you inspired me to write "Not Enough". And I'm happy to call you a friend.

I also want to give a shoutout to Makyla Brannin and Selina Gaston. Makyla, you are such an amazing friend I'm so glad that we are as close as we are. I will forever and always be your clone! Selina, from the day you hogged the heat in 6th hour study hall to now you've inspired me in so many different ways. You've helped me understand more than you even more than you thought you understood. You've always been there to cover my back and I'll always be there to cover yours. I love you two so much and I'm so glad to look at you both as my sisters I never had.

SHORT

FICTION

Abuse

By Carlee Jones

My everyday life was kinda dull and uneventful. I woke up, went to school for eight hours, then went to work for six more hours. It was stressful on me to balance both of these things. After all of that was done, I'd go home and do my homework for two hours. Then I'd spend some time with my family on our breathtaking patio outside. Around midnight I'd go lay in my bed and slowly drift into a deep and dark sleep with hopes to not awake. All that was destroyed when I went to the skating rink and my "friend" Corey Boyles was there.

I was patiently waiting outside for my dad to pick me up when I saw Corey and I went up to him. I poked his cheek, which was apparently a bad idea because he then grabbed me by my hair, pulled me to the ground, and punched me in my face and side. I felt like my life hit rock bottom. Throughout all of this my sister was the only one there for me. She would hold me and comfort me while I cried. Even my parents weren't there for me during this travesty. That one event changed my whole life. I found out I couldn't trust someone who I thought was my friend. Getting beat up by Corey really affected me. The things I endured after that were unbelievable. Why did all this pain and suffering happen to me of all people?

After that tragedy, I was abused by half the guys I dated. I was sexually assaulted last year by someone I thought I could trust. When I told my parents what happened, they said it was my fault. How was I supposed to know they were going to do these things to me? It wasn't my fault.

I constantly thought of suicide and how I could end all of the pain I went through. With just slit of the wrists I could be gone. Out of all the things to happen to me, the biggest thing I faced was being sexually assaulted. After it happened, I didn't eat for a few months because every time I'd eat something I would force myself to throw it up. I didn't even have the motivation to get out of the house anymore. Every time I'd take a shower, I would scrub my body until it was red or I was bleeding because of how disgusted I felt.

The times I was alone I would self-harm. At one point I accidentally cut too deep and I began bleeding out. I was in the bathtub and had passed out because of how much blood I lost. I was lucky that my brother found me. I woke up in the hospital after it happened.

My parents got me the help I needed to overcome these obstacles that I went through. I was in the hospital for a couple months and I had to go through a lot of counseling and exercises to help me not self-harm anymore. My least favorite exercise was when they had a blade in my room and if I would pick it up it would give me a little shock to where I would put it down.

The shock was like how the shocking trick gum felt. My favorite exercise was when we would go around in a group and talk about what tragic event happened to you. They would then give you the feelings they felt over your situation. It kinda gave me a feeling of closure. I felt so worthless and disgusting before I went to the hospital and had all these wonderful people by my side.

When all of the counseling was over, I was able to go home and be with me family who missed me so much. I used to be a weak, fragile girl who let anyone in without a second thought. I am now a strong, independent woman. After all that happened to me I came back stronger than ever. I was given a fresh start with my life, with no pain or suffering and for that I'm grateful. I'm back to the way things were, but more confident in myself and what I'm doing.

Deceptive Terror

By: Reese Jones

The name is Ellie, I'm eighteen. Eli is my younger brother. He's seventeen. His best friend is Terence, he's eighteen along with his sister Gracie who is my best friend. They're the Hollows. My brother and I just moved to this dead town Brookshire two years ago. That's when we met Gracie and Terence. All four of us were only sophomores. They're not too bad. The boys can be annoying sometimes but I think that's all boys. This is our senior year and it's already between winter and spring. The time when the weather can't decide how warm or cold or even rainy to be each day.

Graduation is creeping up and we still have to write our graduation speeches. I'm god awful at writing. I wouldn't ever be able to be an author. All my books would have blank pages, but Eli can write. He can write all kinds of stuff, from five sentence poems to a five page story about another world of nothing but a great big imagination. Those are two of the many things we don't have much in common. He can write, I can't. He has an imagination, I don't. Eli and I have never been alike, he's always been the outgoing one. Eli also loves school. Me, not so much which explains why I'm always skipping. Eli and Terence always hangout after school, but when I skip, Gracie skips with me. Some days we like to jump from different restaurants and pretend to be on Man vs. Food the show until get we sick. Other days, we hang out at my house and watch bad movies on Netflix. I know these are days I'm wasting that I could be writing my speech. Especially if I want to go on my senior trip. My English teacher and the principal agreed that if our essays are not turned in two days before graduation, that

person would not be going on the trip. Sometimes I think the essay isn't worth writing. I mean, I'm just going to be reading a bunch sentimental lies to a thousand people that are really only meant for my parents who aren't even going to be there. My dad up and left and my mom went whitty and left not only me but herself too. Eli was sixteen. I was seventeen so this was only a year ago which more or so feels like an eternity. We live with my grandparents, probably will until college. If I'm even capable of that. Sometimes I think school, life, it's all pointless. That's probably why I skip so much. Waking up to the same empty feeling everyday, but Eli's is happy so at least no one else feels this way...

(2 weeks later)

My paper is due, and I only have my name written in the top right hand corner. **"Motivation is the key to success."** My English teacher always says. Eli is motivated. I don't know by what, but he is. Probably by a lot of things. He's motivated and determined that's for sure. I envy it.

(2 days later)

Day of Graduation. The day when we stand on stage and lie about how much we enjoyed high school when really it wasn't easy for any of us. Then we stand and fling our graduation hats into the air. **"Man, tomorrow is going to be boring. You Gracie, Eli and Terence all on that trip without me."** I say as I grab ahold of Gracie and hug her tight realizing we are now graduated.

Day after graduation is our senior trip. I believe that they're going to New York. Once again, I'll be stuck at home. What will I do? Stare at a blank wall? Might as well.

It's ten o'clock at night, right on the dot. I feel my phone buzz, It's Gracie.

“Hey, girl! So since you're not stuck at home tomorrow, I need a favor. I know you really wanted to go on the senior trip but since you can't, my grandparents need some help around here for the next two weeks. Hope you can make it!”

Well, guess where I'm headed off to? I go to bed right after I read that text. Six a.m. comes around. I have the hardest time getting out of bed. I roll, and drop onto the floor. I groan. I manage to get up and slowly get into the shower. It's six in the morning, can't expect anyone to move like a lightning bolt that early. I get dressed and I'm in the car and I take off. 512 Wood Drive is their address. They're the only house out here and it's deep in the woods. I turn into their long, narrow driveway and there they stand. They must be eighty years old. All I can think is ***“What did you get me into, Gracie?”***

I get out and they greet me with a hug, a strong hug. They laugh and her grandmother, Elsa says ***“Oh! It's so nice to meet you!” “We're glad to have you!”*** Her grandfather, Fred adds. They help me with my luggage. I did pack enough for two weeks. We get inside and I already have an eerie feeling. Something didn't smell right, smelled like a skunk had died in the house a month ago and they didn't remove it. I asked what that smell might be and got no answer. They just continued to show me around. Once that was done, I finally got settled in. After I get settled in, I started looking around myself. I seen some old photos of what looked like Gracie and Terence's mother before she died 8 years ago. No one knows what happened to her. Not much longer later, Elsa called for dinner. It was homemade mashed potatoes, cornbread, and steak.

We ate, and made conversation. They never once asked about Gracie or Terence. Never even mentioned them. After we ate, it was about eight-thirty. I was quite tired from today so I went straight to bed. I woke up about two-thirty to hearing a woman scream in pain, sounded more like an echo. I stayed in bed but I layed there for about twenty minutes to see if I would hear it again. I never did so I went back to sleep and awoke at six a.m. Elsa woke me up saying breakfast is ready. I could hear the bacon sizzling, I could see the eggs ready to be flipped, and oh gosh I could smell the blueberry pancakes and could feel my mouth water thinking about drizzling the syrup on top.

The next three days seemed calm, quiet. Nothing strange. On that third night, something took over. After dinner, I started to smell that awful skunk smell again. I ignored it, but the smell would not leave my nose for the next hour. Elsa and Fred were nowhere to be found. I followed the stench wherever my nose was leading me. It was leading me to the basement. There was maybe fifteen steps. I counted as I lead myself down to the basement. It was dark and the ceiling tile above my shoulder was leaking. The light bulb was busted out. Luckily, I had grabbed a flashlight right before going downstairs. There was a laundry room on the left and a storage room on the right. The stench was definitely coming from the storage room. There was nothing but boxes stacked up onto each other. There are four boxes sitting on an old, torn couch. This couch must have been a hundred years old. There were two boxes sitting on each end of the couch, stacked on top of one another. The stench was coming from the top box

on the right side of the couch. The box was dusty and quite large. It was not taped. I swiped the dust off the top of the box and opened it.

Gracie and Terence's mother...lying cold and pale inside the box, eyes wide open with fear.

That second, the basement door slams shut and locks. Complete darkness.

“THE BOXER’S LIE”

By: Dylan Shuell

“In the fifth you take the dive” Dom Vespucci says. His large snake like smile appears on his face. He resembles the devil. For a moment I forget that I’m in this Chicago dive bar and think I’m in Hell. Only difference is the smell of sulfur is replaced with smell of cheap cigarettes and lustful drunks. “So Max, we got a deal?” Dom says as he holds up an envelope with 100 dollar bills sticking out. I think of my shot at being the light heavyweight champion of the world. Maxwell “Mad Max” Ryker, the light heavyweight champ. That’ll be amazing. But rent is due and I need to pay it now or me and my girl are out on the street. I reach up and grab the envelope, “I guess we do.” Comes out of my mouth. I wish I could take it back.

After getting some drinks in me I walk home, trying to calm my nerves. What’s Chloe going to think. What’s she going to say. I made a mistake, I know it. I open the door of my apartment and see her walking up to me. Still as beautiful as the day I met her. She kisses my cheek. “You ready to be the champ, champ?” she asks me. Her voice is innocent and sweet. Makes me feel warm and loved. “Yeah.” I reply, not excited anymore. She walks into the living room. You can’t even tell she’s two months pregnant. Hell, my hole keeps getting deeper and deeper. “Baby I’m going to go to the gym.” I say. “Have fun.” She replies.

I go up against the bag hitting it over and over again. My fist are starting to hurt, but I’m letting out all my frustrations. I’m losing my career, the thing I put my heart and soul into. Chloe may leave me cause she always tells me to stay away from Dom. Dom’s been after me since I

beat Robin Norris in 2014. My first fight ever. I think and think. If I don't take the dive and win, I get the belt, but I may leave my child orphaned. Maybe I should just flip a coin.

I walk into my bedroom. It's filled with darkness, but I can see the figure of Chloe. I move up slowly to her stomach I then begin to speak to my unborn child. "Hi son... daughter, I know it's early and I know you may become an asshole like your father, but I think you're going to do great things. Be a great person. The person I always wished I could be. The person who don't deal with the people I deal with. The person who doesn't take a beating to make money. I also wanted to let you know I love you, and always will." I kiss her stomach. "That's sweet and it will be great." Chloe says. I get up and crawl next to her. "Sorry for waking you up." I said.

"Don't be. Baby, what's wrong?"

"I made a mistake."

"Oswald's not a mistake."

"What happened to naming it Jessica?"

"I think it's a boy now and I like Oswald."

"Well that names a mistake, but it's not that. That child is not a mistake in my eyes."

"What is it?"

"I made a deal with Vespucci."

"Max what the hell. You know that he's a snake."

"I know."

"Then why'd you make the deal?"

"Because the bills are late and we're about to be parents."

"Max." I can tell she's pissed.

“Hey I’ll be fine. We’re going to make them regret ever making that deal with me.”

“Max no.”

“I was paid to lose, but I’m going to win. He paid me 50 grand to lose, but we’re going to be millionaires at the end of this all.”

“Please baby, you know they won’t even be able to touch me.”

Weeks passed, and I’ve been training. Focusing on what I’m going to do, and now it’s finally time. Fight night. As I’m throwing up into the toilet in my locker room, Chloe is placing her bets. My trainer, Jeffy Donner, is watching me throw up. He’s an old time boxer who gave it his all before getting a fatal brain injury that almost left him dead. “I remember my first title fight. I didn’t throw up, but boy did I have the runs.” He says, trying to make all of this feel better. He has no idea. I move away, he wipes off my mouth. “I’m ready.” comes out. I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.

I walk out into the stadium. The crowd is drunk from the three fights before me. And now it’s the main event. I focus on the ring that feels a mile away. Frank Dean, my opponent, is already up there. He’s jabbing at the air. As I move closer to him I start to see his true age. This man is 41 years old and is still boxing, he’s a crazy bastard. I step into the ring. The lights heat hit my skin and it feels like I’m next to the sun. My eyes wander through the crowd. I see a man throwing up, a few famous faces, and then Dom Vespucci. His snake like grin, his twisted eyes, I swear he’s an overweight Satan. Jeffy taps my shoulder. I look to the center. The announcer walks up to it. “Ladies and Gentlemen...” He announces. He reads us the rules and Frank and I touch gloves.

The bell rings, we both move in. Frank's slow, slower than I expected. He swings. Hits me in the nose. This was weak. He's slow, weak, and too old for this. It's my shot. My chance to take what was his and turn it into mine. He keeps jabbing me in the face over and over again. It's nothing. No swelling, no bruises, no since in pain for me. I swing at him. Square into his face. Frank falls back against the ground. His body shakes. I watch. His trainer climbs in and rushes toward him. And before I knew it I'm being pulled away.

I sit in my locker room, Jeffy moves back and forth. "Dammit kid. You don't think I didn't know about your little bet with Vespucci. Hell I know your mom. What am I supposed to tell her when you die? 'Your kids a dumbass shouldn't have made that bet.' Yeah I ain't getting chewed out for your mistake." He rambles off his tongue. I stop, listening and focus on my hands. Looking at the wrapping on them. "Cut me free." I say to him. He stops what he's doing and looks at me. "Cut me free Jeffy." I say to him once again. He pulls out his scissors from his back pocket. He begins to cut my hands free. I rub them. "Is he dead?" I ask. "Maybe. You never know." Jeffy replies, his cigarette is almost finished.

There's a knock at the door. My body jolts away from it. Jeffy looks at me. Neither of us say a word. I look into the shower room. Windows stand close toward the ceiling. "Tell who ever it is I'm in the shower. I walk over to the tin garbage can and grab it. I stop at the doorway into it. Jeffy is standing at the locker room door. The knocking continues. We stare at each other. I reach in and turn on the shower, then walk in.

Jeffy opens the door. Dom Vespucci and his main hit man a low down hood named Walter walk in. Walter sits back. Vespucci does the talking. "So Jeff where's Max?"

"He's in the shower Dom." Jeffy replies.

“I wouldn’t bother him now. He’s beaten up about Frank”

“Oh, how he killed Frank?” Dom asks.

“It was an accident Dom. You know what those are, right?”

“No, I don’t make them.” Dom pulls out his gun and shoots Jeffy.

“Till now.”

I grab the garbage can, slam it against the window and it shatters. I begin to climb through it. A bullet skids by my calf cutting it. I fall through the window. Two floors down into glass isn’t the greatest feeling in the world. I begin to crawl up and off the glass. It falls off my robe. My head is shaken, but I need to get out of here. Jeffy I will avenge you, I will make these bastards pay.

I run for a block till I find a taxi cab parked against the curb. I open the back door and fall into the cab.

“Sorry Mister I’m off duty.” the driver says.

She’s a hispanic woman. Very beautiful, don’t know what she’s doing driving a cab.

“You’re on duty now and if you drive fast I’ll give you a good tip.” I reply.

The driver turns around and looks at me.

“Sir get out of my car.”

I look into her eyes, a bright green that other men get lost in.

“I already killed a man tonight don’t make me kill another.”

I grab her card and read her name, Vanessa Rodrigues. Her phone number is in it. I pocket her card just incase.

She drives me to the hotel. I paid her with all I had and then I went on my way. This hotel is quiet, no need to worry about being spotted or taken down. I walk in, and Chloe is asleep. I open my briefcase and start getting dressed. She hadn't gotten the money, I already knew that. So I'm going to need to. She just needs sleep so I won't bother her. I walk to the door and take one last look at her. My everything. If I lose her I'm nothing.

After stopping at a few bookie locations like bars, pawn shops, and a church I arrive to my final a little pawnshop on a corner. I walk up to the door. Above it reads BENNY'S PAWN SHOP OPEN 24/7. I walk in and right away you can tell it has mold. I walk up to Benny, who sits there already counting out my money. I walk up.

"Pleasure doing business with you." I say as I grab the money.

"You're a rat bastard, you know that right?" He says.

I slide the money into a plastic bag and walk out.

I walk out of the pawn shop to see Walter leaned up against my car. I set down the plastic bag and look at him.

"You messed up Max." Walter says.

He walks up to me in my face. He must have big balls cause nobody gets in my face. He pulls out his gun and aims it at me.

"Any last wishes?" He says.

I stare at the barrel and throat punch him. I grab the gun, now resting in my hand. I aim the gun at his head.

"You're a big man Max, ain't you?"

He does have balls. He throws a knife into my thigh. I shoot him in the head. I look into the pawn shop. Benny is calling the cops. I grab Walter and throw him into my back seat.

I'm driving down the country roads. Walter sitting in the back seat. I'm imagining his face. Blood running down his nose and going to his cracked chapped lips and his eyes just staring. I listen to the silence of the road. Suddenly I hear groaning from the backseat. Walter begins to speak even though he's dead.

“So Max how does it feel to kill 2 people tonight?”

“You're dead, so shut your whore mouth.”

“You kiss your mother with that mouth”

“She's dead.”

“I hope she likes me.” He chuckles like he's the funniest guy in the world.

“You're just in my head. Mind games.”

“This ain't no game. I've seen the devil and he's Dom Vespucci.”

I turn on the radio in hopes of drowning him out, but then he starts to scream.

“My kids Max, what about them? My dog, my wife, my son and daughter, you just took food out of their mouths and my kids are too young to work and I know my whore wife ain't going to work. Hell, they'll just eat the dog.”

“Shut up!” I scream at him.

I'm getting mad, my blood is boiling. And my foot pushes harder down on the pedal. I'm going about 70 on one of those country road highways that you should only be going 55 on. Walter is just loving this laughing and having a ball.

I pass a cop, still speeding. I'm not slowing down. The lights turn on and the cops are on my ass. My heart is pounding.

“You better pull over. No wait. Actually. This is fun. Flip the pig off, make this get nasty.” I slow down and pull over to the side. The cop stops behind me. My heart races, sweat pools from my forehead. I feel like niagra falls.

“He's going to find me boyo. And send you to the big house.” Walter won't shut up.

“Walter if you don't shut it I'm going to glue your damn mouth shut.”

The officer is at my wind unexpectedly quick or maybe I'm not paying attention.

“Sir you know how fast you were going.” He says.

“No, my speedometer broke.” I say to him.

His light shines into my face, he then looks around the cop car hopefully he doesn't see

Walter who's lying on the floor of the backseat. The cop brings his eyes back on me.

“How fast do you think you were going?”

“50.”

“Try 75.”

“Damn I didn't know it was that bad.”

“Well sir I'm going to give you a verbal warning. Get that fixed so this doesn't happen again.”

“I will officer.”

“Have a good, safe night.”

“You too.”

The officer walks away. I didn't pay attention to Walter talking through that whole thing.

“Hey come back this guy a murderer. Get back here pig.”

I arrived at the lake. A house on the other side a party is going on. I floor the car into the lake. Jumping out before I arrive to it. I walk up to the edge and watch it sink down in. I hear Walters taunts sinking down into the abyss. I begin to walk home carrying a duffle bag full of money, nearly a million dollars.

I call the taxi driver and ask her to pick me up. I don't know why she comes, I scared her half to death, must be the money. I'm nearly falling asleep in her back seat. Just can't wait to crawl into bed.

“So you killed a man?”

“My hands are dirty.”

“Did you mean to?”

“The first one no, second time was protection.”

“Why'd you kill the first one?”

“Sorry ma'am I don't feel like talking about this.”

“Mister I feel like I'm helping you get away with murder so forgive me to know what I'm getting into.”

“You're getting into nothing. You didn't take anyone's life. It'd be easier for you to play dumb.”

I crawl into my bed and fall asleep. I'm awoken about an hour later by someone knocking something over. Shit, I'm in my apartment. I must've gave her my actual address and not the hotel. I move slowly through the apartment. Pictures of me and Chloe hang on the wall along with pictures of me training and boxing and of her throughout highschool and college. My

hands grip my bat, the only weapon I have in my house. I walk into the living room that is filled with darkness and that has no sign of life.

A head comes flying from the shadows. It's the driver, Vanessa. Her hair is long and her neck is now short. I step back.

"Look what you did." Dom says as he steps out of the shadows.

He's wiping off his hands with a once white towel that is now red.

"I didn't do anything." I reply.

"You killed Frank, you killed Walter, and now you killed her."

"I didn't put a hand on her."

"You led her here. You led her to me. What'd you expect to happen? Everything end happily ever after."

"I didn't expect her to get involved."

He digs through her purse like it's a gold mine.

"She does have some beautiful kids." He throws their pictures onto the floor.

"Bummer they're orphans now."

"Don't lay a hand on them."

"No, I'm just going to lay my hands on you."

I'm cracked in the back of the head by something I didn't expect. I fall through the darkness. Emptiness of the abyss. All there is or ever will be is darkness. And I'm just falling. No objects, no time, no distance, no end just space. All I think about is Chloe she's going to be so pissed. Right now her and that baby are the only good things in my life.

I wake from the car hitting a pothole. I look around. A gangster sits next to me, his gun aimed. The driver doesn't pay any mind, and Dom sits shotgun. I look out the window and see nothing but empty cornfields. I look back at the gangster next to me. He's not paying attention, looking at ahead of the road. I sock him in the face. I then grab the gun and aim it at the driver. BANG. The driver's head that now has a gaping, bloody hole falls into the steering wheel. The car swerves and flies off the road, flipping into the empty cornfield on its roof.

The sound of the horn drowns out everything. I kick open the door and crawl out. I get up the gun still in my hand. It doesn't feel right. None of this does. Then with no warning or thought I begin to throw up. The passenger door open. Dom crawls out. His nose is broken and he's coughing. I wipe away the vomit and grab him by the collar, putting my gun against his fat neck.

"Stand up." I say to him.

He starts getting up. My gun still focused on him.

"Now walk." I yell at him.

We begin our descent into the cornfield.

We walk for miles into the cornfield. Can't even hear the horn anymore. Dom keeps tripping over his broken leg. I keep my gun trained on him. I'm focused on him. He falls down. We're far enough. "Do it." He says. "Pull the damn trigger." He's ready for death. Probably can't walk anymore. Maybe he's just too lazy too. "On your knees." I say. He moves to his knees. I'm not taking my eyes off of him. Not giving him the chance. "Just do it." he screams at me. "Dom, you put yourself into all of this. You made yourself into the Dom, you wanted me to fight Frank,

you killed the driver. You can say it's my fault, but in the end it all boils down to you. Dominic Arnold Vespucci, have you made your peace with God?"

I aim the gun, not pulling the trigger. I fire, missing him. Dom smiles. "You missed." He says, his voice is becoming tired. "I didn't aim for you. I'm not like you Dom. But if you come after me I'll make you wish I did shoot you in the back of the head." I walk away leaving him in the middle of the cornfield.

I arrive at the hotel, Chloe hugs me. I hug her. It's the warmth I need after this cold night. "Let's go baby." I say. "Go where?" she replies staring into my eyes. "L.A. seems nice." I say. We then walk to are car everything we need is in it. We then drive into the sunset and live happily ever after... I guess.

THE END

The Puppet's Master

Once upon a time in the small town of Salem IL, I fell into a dark place. It was such a dark point I never thought I'd see the light again. It all started my freshman year, everyone was doing it and it seemed like fun and games so I thought I should too. Most of my friends did it as well as family members, so I decided to too. My friends and I got high everyday, all day. It started out just smoking cannabis or "weed". Slowly it escalated rapidly to harder drugs. I started drinking and popping pills, sometimes I mixed all three. I started living in my own hell. I became a whole different person and everyone could see it, my teachers, family, friends, peers, and everyone in between. When one of my best friends passed it only got worse, I started pushing everyone away and relying solely on the drugs. I ruined all types of relationships with family, friends, and significant others. I started getting into trouble and breaking the law just to get that next high. My mother even told me she just wanted to see her son again, and that she missed the old me, the more happy and kind me. She would often mention rehab to me and I'd reply with "I don't have a problem" or "I can stop whenever I want". But I couldn't stop, I did have a problem, and a big one at that. When I became a puppet to those pills I didn't care about anybody but myself, and when that next high was coming. Along with the addiction came depression and thoughts of suicide. I dropped out of school twice and I wanted it all to end. It got so bad that I got high off of those pills and decided to go for a drive which ended shortly after it began. I was flying sixty-five down a country road when I passed out and swiped two trees, hit a culvert, and went airborne before coming to a halt. Not to mention my license was suspended, but it only worsened from there.

Finally one late June night I decided it was time for me to go, I just couldn't take it anymore. I had enough, so I started drinking, smoking, and popping pills. By the early hours of the next morning I consumed a lot of alcohol, cannabis, and roughly forty pills. I passed out in

IGA parking lot, had a seizure, and was spotted by an off-duty police officer. Next I was being woken up by police and EMT's. I kept coming in and out of consciousness from there until I got to the hospital. When I arrived I slept all day until that night, and when I awoke I received some information that I was being sent to Champaign. I got sent to the Pavilion, a rehabilitation center/psych ward. I was there for about a week, and I had no idea where I was and I'd never been that far from my family for a long period of time. When I woke up I was very puzzled and surrounded by strangers. I soon started to somewhat feel at home and everybody there treated me like family. While I was there I learned a lot of new coping methods that would help me deal with everything and stay sober. I've been sober for four months now and I've honestly never felt better. I'm also on non-addictive anti-depressants so I'm almost always in a good mood. Never again will I be a slave to those little white demons, I am no longer the puppet but the master.

Thunderstorms set me free.

The country road reaches across the field of brown and into the forest of *thick lush* green. There's a bridge with metal railings with a *roaring* creek below. I stand there breathing in the scent of the spring air. In the distance, a *beast* roars and you're a fool to not be scared. I am both scared and excited for the *electricity* in the air fills my insides and the the world around me *transforms*. The trees tops sway and the birds *retreat* out of sight. I can no longer hear Their chirping like I did before and it may be the smart thing to retreat from the *fury* roaring towards me but I don't.

The *pressure* drops and the sky darkens up with beautiful rolling storm clouds. I admire the tents of green and blue and how the sun fights to break through them. Everything is more green now. It's just as if the world around me is *welcoming* the coming rain. The breeze *tickles* my skin at first sending chills down my spine. Then it pushes against my chest with such force it feels as if it fills my lungs to the point of *exploding* as it *tangles* my long free hair. *Electricity* fills the air and the sky *cracks* like a *whip* bringing me to my knees. I feel the dirt on my hands now, I like the feeling of the small rocks and brown powder on my palms. I stare down at the ground for a moment and catch my breath.

There is no *society* here in this moment, I could strip naked and the storm would not care, it would *destroy* me all the same. There is no *rules* for the lightning strikes where it wants and the rain falls as fast as it would like. I *yearn* to be part of this storm and its *freedom*, I want so badly to forget the stresses of my daily life and become an *entity* of this *beautiful freak of nature*. I could *dance* with the Lightning and *sing* with the thunder as the rains wash all my worries away.

I can see the downpour off in the distance now. Should I *run*? The question only crosses my mind for a fraction of a second because I still *fear* this beast, I wish to be no fool but my *undeniable* need of the rain on my skin *overrides* my thoughts and I stand there watching the wall of pouring water race towards me. The water hits at once soaking my hair and clothes and

blinding my eyes and cooling my nerves. I throw my head back and holler along with the *deafening* wind. Everything feels right, nothing feels wrong, and I have never felt more *exhilarated*. For a *wise man* once said, "*All good things are wild and free.*"

Quote by Thoreau.

By: Jo Hongsermeier

Cursed

“Isabell?” “Isabell, where are you?” yelled Jasper in a melodic voice. “What do you want Jas?” said Isabell from the kitchen. “I just wanted to see if you got all your stuff unpacked.” “Yes, I did. I don't really have a lot besides clothes and Binx.” Binx belonged to Isabell, she had found him outside of their old house the day after their mother Lilly, went missing. Jasper couldn't tell her no when she asked him if she could keep him. “Speaking of, where is he?” asked Isabell. “Last time I saw him he was laying on your bed.” said Jasper.

Isabell went to her room and found Binx exactly where Jasper had said that he was. Upon her arrival to the room he opened up his green sparkling eyes just enough to see who it was that dare to disturb his slumber. Isabell had always felt a strong connection to Binx, not only did she find him the day after her mother disappeared, but his eyes reminded her of Lilly.

After she promptly picked up Binx, she headed for the kitchen again, Binx, although unhappy about being awoken, didn't make too much of a fuss. He knew that he was bound to get fed for the disturbance that he was shown. After Isabell stood at the fridge for what seemed like 20 minutes, she decided she was going to make a frozen pizza. She asked Jasper if he had wanted any but he told her that he was going out to eat with some of his new work buddies, they were going to welcome him to town by having some drinks. “That's all the more for me,” responded Isabell. She turned the oven on to the listed temperature on the box and calculated how long it would take before she could eat.

Jasper started getting ready at around 5 o'clock, by that time the timer for the pizza was going off. He told her that he would be out very late and not to worry. By the time Jasper left,

Isabell had already cut the pizza and made some chocolate milk; the only thing she had left to do was pick out a movie. In honor of the christmas season, she chose to watch *Frosty the Snowman*.

Dusk had fallen about an hour before the movie ended. Isabell got up to put the rest of the leftover pizza in the fridge. Binx ran into the kitchen like he was shot from a cannon. Isabell didn't think anything of it. He was always playful at that time of night. But suddenly the room got extremely cold; Isabell became overwhelmed with exhaustion, like she hadn't slept in days. She absent mindedly turned off the tv and the lights, then she proceeded to lock the door. She went to her room, and fell asleep almost as fast as she closed her eyes.

"Who are you? Isabell asked. The boy simply stood there and stared at her. "What's your name?" she asked instead. She still was yet to get a response. In the back of her mind, she had a feeling, a feeling of knowing who he was, she wasn't scared of him, she just wanted to know how she knew this boy. She started going over him in detail, it wasn't as if he was answering her questions. She noticed his eyes first, they were blue, crystal clear blue, the kind that reminds people of beaches. Most people think of dark and creepy waters when it comes to drowning, but Isabell wanted nothing other than to drown in his eyes. Next, she noticed his hair, it was dark but looked rich in texture, it was rather long, but it was wavy at the same time; he had it brushed to the right side of his face. He had on a military uniform. She was able to just barely get a glimpse of his name tag that read, "Taylor."

Isabell was confused, she knew she wasn't scared. He gave off a comforting aura, one that she felt as though she could fall into. The boy started to walk towards her, she tried to reflect his actions, but it seemed as if she was trapped in that spot. It was in this moment that she began to panic, he somehow sensed this, he started to walk towards her at a faster but non-threatening

pace. He walked straight up to her and hugged her, she felt her head start to spin, she really thought she was falling. He leaned back just enough to place an everlasting kiss on her forehead.

Isabell jolted up, she was breathing heavily and her mind and heart were racing. She took some deep breaths in order to calm down. She got up and went to the bathroom, and got a wash rag, she turned the water on as cold as possible. She pressed the cloth to her face, with her eyes closed she began to go over everything that happened in her dream.

All day long she thought about him, she tried to place the dream out in front of her, going over it in every detail possible. It seemed as though she was trying to dissect her dream. She felt off, she thought that maybe it was the weather getting to her, it was raining and very gloomy outside. She has a condition called S.A.D, seasonal affective disorder, it's when the weather messes with her emotions. Usually on a day like this she would be very depressed, and although she wasn't happy, she wasn't depressed either. She seemed as though she was in distress. After her mother disappearing and her father dying, Isabell is connected to her emotions in such a strong way, she feels everything so deeply.

That night when she crawled into bed, she only hoped that the boy would appear again. She didn't know why he, and or the dream meant so much, but she knew there was a reason. After about ten short minutes, she slipped into the hollows of her mind, only to find the boy lurking there. He reached his hand out to her, she obediently grasped his hand and followed him. She didn't know where she was, it was dark and foggy, it looked almost like a swamp. He lead her through two rusty gates. As Isabell was looking around he stopped abruptly. She looked down only to see her mother's grave. Although Isabell and Jasper were never told that their mother died, nor was her body ever found, they knew deep down that she was truly gone. The

only thing Isabell could do was ask, “Where are we?” The boy hung his head down low, causing his hair to cover his eyes. “I don’t know, Miss.” he said softly, as if he was ashamed. “Then why did you bring me here? Who are you even?” Isabell asked in a assertive, but soft tone. “I didn’t bring you here, Lucian is the one who brought you here, I’m only here to protect you from things your eyes cannot see.” “How do you know my father?” She asked in a panicked voice. “He was the leader of my platoon in the military, he’s sent me here to give you something, but he said that he wouldn’t give me the item unless you helped me first.” “What am I sup-” Isabell stopped talking as she heard them, they were so loud, getting closer and closer to where the two were standing, she saw the men on both sides, she froze, she didn’t know what she was supposed to do. She was merely a deer in headlights; until the unknown, but familiar boy cupped her face with his hands and kissed her forehead, yet again.

This time Isabell woke up in more of a panic, she was drenched in sweat and was shaking vigorously. She didn’t know what was happening anymore. Her mind kept racing over what happened this time. The first thing she questioned after analyzing her dream was why he always kissed her forehead and why that was always the end of the dream. Although she had slept all night, she still felt exhausted.

With Jasper working all the time, Isabell was alone a lot. It didn’t really bother her, she liked being alone with just her thoughts and Binx of course. She was laying on the couch channel searching the tv while he was laying on her lap. “Why are we so lazy, Binx?” she asked the cat in a playful manner, as if he would answer her. It seemed as though her question got through because he started to purr loudly. Within a short amount of time she stopped petting Binx, and fell into a sweet and delicate slumber.

She was standing alone in a field, there was an abundance of trees to her right. If she would of had a coin she would have flipped it. Tails, she goes into the trees; heads, she walks out into the field. She decided to go with heads. She had the blurry, foggy vision that she had had in the previous trips. She knew she was the only figure around, but she still felt the presence of someone else. The only problem is, she didn't know who, or even what that presence may be.

“What are you doing out here?” said a voice from behind her. She nearly jumped out of her skin. She turned around only to find that it was just the boy standing there. “You really shouldn't come up behind people like that.” she told him. “I'm sorry Isabell, but it isn't safe for you here.” “How do you know my name but I don't know yours?” she asked the boy. “Your father told me, amongst the other things he said about you as well. And my name is Caspian, Caspian Taylor.” “Well, Caspian, can you please explain to me what all of this is, why all of this keeps happening. I really don't understand and my mind is racing around so many things. There's so many questions I'd like to ask.” “This really isn't a good time or place. I can't just say these things aloud. The only other option is if I come to your world, but the only way that's possible is if I can use manifestation upon a living thing.” “Would an animal work?” Asked Isabell. “Yes, it's also much safer. For myself and the animal. But wouldn't it be a little odd for you to sit outside and talk to a squirrel?” she giggled softly at his question. “I have a cat, his name is Binx. As long as he isn't hurt in this process I don't mind. But how will this work?” she asked him. “You both have to be asleep at the time. Just before you transfer over, I'll switch realms, once I've crossed over I'll find a way to wake you.” he told her. “I'm assuming it's almost time to leave this place, but can I ask one question before I go?” “Of course.” he said. “Why do you kiss me on the forehead?” he started to blush. “Lucian told me that I must show a

sign of passionate affection to get you to go back, if not you'd want to stay here and your body in the other world would still be alive, it would just be in a coma. I kiss your forehead as a goodbye gesture, I felt as though you wouldn't want to be kissed on the mouth by a stranger." He told her shyly. "This may sound weird but I don't see you as a stranger. I feel like i've known you for such a long time, like we have some type of bond or connection." She stated. "Maybe we do."

He said as he grabbed her arms gently and pulled her close and kissed her forehead.

Isabell woke up different this time, she wasn't acting like she had before, instead she was smiling and seemed bubbly. She couldn't understand why but she felt as though she was falling for Caspian, a boy that she really didn't know. Everything just seemed right to her, which was strange. After losing both her parents, she didn't get attached to anyone, it was one of her weaknesses. She thought that she'd never be able to fall in love. But here she was falling, and she didn't even know.

She went about her day thinking about Caspian, she was impatiently waiting for the night to arrive, along with him. To pass the time she watched movies and ate a few snacks here and there. She wouldn't really let Binx leave her side, she didn't want him to go run off and hide. The hours of the day went by so slow for her. She got tired of watching tv and trying to hold Binx back so she eventually let him go and decided to go for a walk. She put on warmer clothes and headed out. She didn't really know where she was going, she was just walking with no point of stopping. She ended up walking down the river bank, the sun was setting so all the pinks and oranges danced across the water. She couldn't help but to feel lonely. Oddly enough as it may sound, she wanted Caspian to be there with her.

She had walked quite away from where she first started, she kept a steady gaze at the ground, every so often she'd look up at the sky. She wished that her eyes could take pictures, she would love to keep those memories in the back of her mind like a file, one she could just look back at whenever she wanted. As she was walking there was a big piece of stone, she nearly tripped over it but somehow managed to catch herself. She bent down to look at it, wondering why it would be there in the middle of the ground. She brushed away at the leaves and the mud, while doing so, she noticed that the stone wasn't completely in the ground, it was loose. So she wiggled it out of the ground, laying there under where the stone had been was a piece of cloth. She picked it up only to find that it was part of the american flag. In the distance, she heard an obnoxiously loud boom, as if a bomb was dropped. She quickly put the piece of flag in her pocket and set the stone back in place. She got up and started walking back, it got dark, fast, faster than it should have.

When she got back home she saw Caspian standing there by the doorstep. "What are you doing here?" She asked. "Where did you find it?" Caspian demanded. Nervously she replied, "Find what?" "The flag Isabell, where did you find it?!" "I found it down by the river bank, it was underneath a heavy stone. Will you please tell me what's going on?" She begged him.

'I can't promise you what will happen, but I can promise to protect you.' He said while trying to hold back tears. "What do you mean?" She asked him panically. "The flag is cursed Isabell, it was my flag and someone cursed it. I disappeared instantly. Everyone had thought that I ran away, but that wasn't the case. When Lucian died and crossed over I told him what happened. He knew that I could pass between realms through dreams so he asked me to reach out to you. When your mother died he saw it happen. He didn't tell me anything other than the fact

that i needed to take you there. He said there was something left behind. But now... You're cursed as well, but because you're cursed under the one put upon me, we're both going to be sent to the other side. We're bound together now, it's something that can't be broken. I know I should have told you but I didn't have the time.. This is all my fault. I've taken your life from you. I can't even fathom a way in which I could ever make up for this..." Isabell knew she didn't have time to grieve, she thought about Jasper, the pain he would go through, between that and the fact of leaving Binx, it broke her heart but she didn't have time to say goodbye; she put the flag back into her pocket and gave the world, her world, one last look through the tears that flooded out of her eyes and she whispered, "I'm sorry." She walked up to Caspian and kissed him knowing, it'd be the last moment of her life, but there's always good in goodbye.

Pac-Man Survival

Pac-Man was rushing through the woods away from the ghost chasing him. His only thoughts were to find a weapon, then find PAC-Girl. Pac-Man ran and ran until he reached a river where he then climbed a tree to rest for a while. A few moments later Pac-Man heard footsteps underneath him. He looked down and saw a girl with a bow and even some arrows. He jumped down on the girl from the branch he was resting on. They wrestled for for a short period of time until he finally got ahold of the bow. While stumbling through the woods trying to find PAC-Girl, he ran into her. They both ran through the woods trying to find a way out but instead of finding a way out they found a castle. They decided to explore the castle a bit and try to find food and a place to sleep. While looking around they found that there was a locked door with a sign keep out. Of course with their curious nature they had to open the door, so they looked around for something to break the door down with. They eventually found an axe in the closet, which they broke the door down with. When they walked inside they found a control room, looking around they realized that this was all a game, that they were not in control of themselves and they were being played. **DUN DUN DUN.....**

-By: Trinity Herrington

Nala's Nightmare

I am running through the forest as fast I can. His footsteps are tromping behind me. I feel his fetid breath on the back of my neck. No matter how fast I run or how loud I scream, he will win. I see a path through a grove and take off towards it. For a moment I do not hear or see him. I ducked under a branch and darted to a tree; I leaned up against it. I cover my mouth since it seems my breathing can be heard from miles away. It becomes silent. Not one single insect buzzing, not a rustle of the leaves from the soft kiss given to them by the wind. It is so quiet. It is too quiet. His gigantic claws cover my mouth and face. I holler at the top of my lungs but all that emits is a hoarse whisper. His shriek in my ear becomes deafening. I try to pry his colossal sized paw off my face. All I can hear is that howl, getting louder and louder.

I shoot up in bed. I hit my alarm clock that keeps going off. I sit there, and catch my breath. I run to my door and open it. The light from our living room floods my room. I lean against the wall as I recollect my nightmare.

Swiftly I go to my lamp and hit the switch. No light comes from my lamp. I turn it on again and nothing. I go to our bathroom down the hall and begin to get ready for school. After my shower I head downstairs for the daily breakfast with the family.

"My bulb in my lamp went out, Mom." I grab a bowl from our cabinet. My father gives a grunt as to his reply.

"You are 18 years old, Nala. You need to quit worrying about a nightlight and start thinking of colleges." he says irritated. He doesn't know how I feel. He never did; probably never will.

"Mom, can you please lend me a few bucks so I can go get more bulbs?" I begged.

“Honey, your father is right. Timmison and Grazie don’t have a lamp on when they sleep. You need to quit worrying about it,” she says calmly.

“So, is that a no?” Neither of them reply to me. I sigh, eat my meal, and slam the door behind me as I am leaving for school.

“They just don’t get it, Kenya.” I relay the story to my best friend. Through thick and thin, we have always been together. Been friends since the second grade.

“I could lend you a few dollars, N.” Kenya says smiling. “I know how you feel; I am sorry that they are being like this,” she adds. I take the money and give her a hug. If it weren’t for her I probably wouldn’t be sleeping tonight.

After school I drive down to Andy’s Hardware and get the bulbs and head home. I come in the door and throw my bag down on the couch. “Mom? Dad? I am home.” I yell. I go to the kitchen to get a bottle of water and I see the note on the refrigerator.

*Went out to Timmison’s soccer game. I have Grazie with me. Dad has to work late.
Dinner is in the fridge.*

Love, mom.

I sigh and crumple the note in my hand and toss it into the garbage. I take my books out and do my homework. I later on, heat up the roast my mom had made for dinner and eat it. I look at the clock after I am finished and see that it is already eight o’clock. I head upstairs and grab my phone and call my mom. After four rings it goes to voicemail. “Hey, mom. It is already eight and I haven’t even heard from you today. I guess just call me back or send me a text later. Love you, bye.” I hang up the phone.

I head back downstairs and grab my books and another water and bring them into my room. I set my bottle down and look at my vanity beside my bed. I take a step back and grunt. I pick up my phone and dial my dad's number and wait for him to answer. He picks up after two rings. "Hello Nala; what do you need; I am at work?"

"I can't believe you actually took my lamp out of my room!" I ranted.

"Nala, if it is that big of a deal, I will buy you a new lamp. But try to sleep with out for one night." he says assuringly. I sigh.

"Fine, but only tonight." I hang up the phone. I sit down and begin to study for my Government test. I put in my headphones and begin to listen to the music on my phone when I hear a huge bang downstairs. "Mom? Is that you?" I yell out of my door. I hear someone shifting things around downstairs. I start to make my way down the hallway when I hear scraping along the hallway downstairs. I lean up against the wall as I peered around the corner of the stairs. I see that our door is wide open. The coffee table is broke in half and see scratches dug into the wall.

Quickly, I sneak to my room. I grab my phone off the bed and duck under it. I try to dial nine one one, but there is zero service. I hear rustling around downstairs in the kitchen. I lay on my stomach and watch the door. I press my ear on the floor, never taking my eyes off it. I don't hear anything. I begin to crawl towards the door when I see my door knob turning.

I hurry up and move back towards under my bed. I keep my eyes peeled to the door. As soon as it opens I see a very familiar hand. This hand has the same claws from the creature in my nightmare. My hand covers my mouth to stifle a scream, as I watch my exact nightmare appear in front of my eyes. The figure is tall, about seven foot, with a hairy body and gigantic hands with claws. It looks part human, part cat. The dark eyes are glaring around my room. I refuse to

even blink, with hopes that this beast will leave. It starts towards the door. I can feel my heart in my throat. Just when I think it is about to leave, the creature's claws clamp onto the nape of my neck and it rips me from my sanctuary,

I scream at the top of my lungs as this monster throws me over its shoulder. I begin to pound on its back. The beast doesn't seem fazed by my cries of dismay. I scream and pummel at its back all the way through my house until we are outside. It heads for the woods. I scramble my puzzled brain for an escape. As a last ditch effort I grab a hold of the long hair on this behemoth and pull it as hard as I can. It lets out this horrific scream and throws me off its back. I look down at my hand which has a huge ball of hair in it. I look toward the woods and take off.

I am darting through the forest as fast as I can. I can hear his footsteps trailing behind me. As I feel his musky breath on the back of my neck, I am reminded of my nightmare. No matter how fast I run or how loud I scream, it seems he will win. I see a path through a group of trees and take off towards it. For a moment I do not hear or see him. I sneak under a branch and creep to a tree; I lean up against it. I cover my mouth. It becomes silent. Not one single insect buzzing, not a rustle of the leaves from the soft kiss given to them by the wind. It is so quiet. It is too quiet. His gigantic claws slam across my mouth and face. I cry out as loud as I can, but my muffled voice only sounds like a hoarse whisper. His shriek in my ear seems to get louder and louder. I try to pry his mammoth like paw off my face. All I can hear is that blare, becoming louder in my ears.

I open my eyes and frantically my hand searches for a weapon.

"OW!" I cry. My hand closes on something rigid and sharp; I grab it in my trembling hand and plunge it into the arm of the beast. It yanks away from me and yells in pain as it pulls the

bark out of its arm. As the monster grapples with its injury I spot a branch as thick as my wrist and as long as a broom by my feet. I lunge down towards the bulky branch and take it in my grasp. Immediately I am on my feet and striking my attacker. The branch splinters into two pieces leaving me with only two feet of branch left to defend myself with. Undeterred I continue thrashing this entity. Past its screams of agony and my wails of anger, it's hard to hear anything else. I advanced, intent on plunging the branch into the villain's heart.

I spring up in bed. My body is slimy with perspiration. I wipe the sweat off my forehead and catch my breath. I watch the light of my lamp glisten off my skin. I glance over at my clock. It reads three in the morning. I lay back on my damp pillow and repeat to myself until it becomes an affirmation: "It's just a dream; you know what to do." I roll back over, turn my lamp off, and I drift into slumber.

By: Bianca Devor

The Family We Never Were

By Kaitlin Nix

This isn't the first time he has felt this way. The darkness enveloping around him, the crisp draft, the soft scent of the midnight breeze cascading from the window to each corner of the room. This doesn't bother him in any way however, for he cannot hear. He was used to this by now, its been like this for years. The poor kid, alone in the attic with nothing but his dog pail of water and bread, his only companion was the sound of silence, that is to say one can hear silence. He was an orphan, twelve years of age and hidden away from the world by his shameful grandmother. It's been two days since she had visited him with refreshments, it was about that time where she would restock, alas as morning came within the few hours, she had not shown up.

She isn't here, Little. This was Soba "talking" with the boy, almost in a telepathic way. He was one of the boy's imaginary critters, this one with the appearance of a feline, long, sleek, and incredibly agile. Almost like a fun father figure. *Fear not, Little, wait a bit longer and come to the window.* This time spoke a small canary, named Ronnie. She was imagined when he saw his first bird chirping on the wires. In an ironic way, she was his mother hen and kept him at ease.

Little obeyed his friend and stumbled to approach the window. *Easy now little.* Ronnie perched on his shoulder and leaned into the boy. *Tell me something, Ronnie, about the outside.* He thought to her. *There are friends for you out there, they are like you and they are all so kind and sweet. They would like to meet you very soon. They told me they will welcome you with a large feast and joyous songs. I have a special song for you too, when it's time, but the party isn't ready yet.* Ronnie replied. A huge smile crept onto Little's face while he stared out into the distance. *I can't wait.* With that his stomach growled. *Come Little, it's time for your meal.* Soba purred up against the boy and led him to the small dish. There was a quarter sized crumble of bread. *It's not much, but you don't want to spoil your appetite for the large feast, do you?* He flicked his tail to the bread in gesture for Little to pick it up. *You're right Soba.* With that he swallowed the bread and pet the small imaginary feline.

Little was quickly interrupted and crashed to the floor. He let out a little whine to his friends. *I'm thirsty, and my legs hurt. My chest hurts, Ronnie, everything hurts.* Ronnie perched on the dog dish. *Get some water, sweet pea.* She chirped. He reached for the bowl and she flew onto Soba's back. When he finally grabbed it, it felt dry. He knocked it over. Empty. *That's okay,* Soba started. *Your friends are preparing drinks for the feast, just wait a bit longer.* Little began to tear up. *Soba, I'm tired of being inside, I want to go play in the grass.* Soba, with Ronnie, nuzzled at the boy. *You can soon, and you and I can play tag, and hide and seek...* Little interrupted him. *I want to play catch too...* Soba rubbed against Little's cheek. *And catch...* he finished.

Little coughed and hacked again. *I love you Soba, you too Ronnie.* Almost at the same time, they reply. *We love you too, Little.*

THUD

Did you feel that? Little attempted to get up, but to no avail, he was too weak. *Feel what?* Soba questioned.

THUD THUD

That, Soba. Little tried again, but crashed back down. *Stay here, Little, don't hurt your muscles, you and Soba can't play if you hurt yourself.* Ronnie warned. *But I want to know what that is.* He whined.

THUD DUM THUD.

Soba leaned against Little. *It is probably your grandmother finding food for you, but you shouldn't eat it, you must rest. So we can play. Close your eyes, you can wait for us to play can't you?* The boy, defeated, agreed and lay his head down.

THUD THUD

I bet your friends can't wait to play with you, I'll be there too! We can play outside, for real! Soba lay into Little's frail arms with him. *And the large feast! Where your friends will sing with you, and I will sing for you!* Chimed Ronnie, nestled in the crevice of Little's neck. *The feast has almost been prepared.* The boy tried to chuckle, but instead came out a pained wheeze. *Save your voice, Little, for the songs.*

THUD THUD THUD

His eyes began to close and his breathing slowed, he closed his eyes at the sight of three men dressed in a dark blue emerging from the door on the attic floor. One almost threw up from the stench. Finally his eyes shut and a two soft voices called to him. This time he heard it now. Soba called, then Ronnie.

"You did it my son, come let's run in the grass together."

"Your feast is ready, my sweet boy, come sing with me."

Together they chimed:

"Now we can finally be the family that we never were."

Ship It

There once was a girl, beloved by her mother and father. She was given everything her heart desired, whether it was a pony or a new doll or a pretty ring. Her parents loved her dearly and she was their only child, so they spoiled her. Emily was a lovely young lady, always polite and always with a smile on her face. Her hair fell in pretty ringlets and was almost the exact color of chocolate, if not for the streak of bright white that wove through the right side of her hair. It was genetic trait, passed down from mother to daughter in her family, just like her grey eyes. Emily bore the mark well and never acknowledged the mean children who would tease her for it. She was almost regal in her manner of walking and talking. A lot of people felt she got it from her mother, who was a kind, gentle woman. Every night, while tucking her daughter into bed, Emily's mother would sing a song of hope and happiness to pass on to the next day. It was supposed to be good luck for the coming day, but one night it wasn't enough.

Emily woke up in the middle of the night, disoriented and drowsy, but also very thirsty. She crawled out of bed and felt around in the dark for her robe and slippers. She slid them on and started down the long dark hallway to the stairs. When she got to the stairs, she was a little frightened, but she was 10 and didn't want to wake her parents up just to get a drink. She began the perilous journey down the winding staircase, jumping at the smallest noises, shivering in her slippers. She reached the bottom without incident and noticed that a lantern was lit in the kitchen. As she crossed the threshold to the kitchen, she saw a pair of legs sticking out behind the table. She knew they were her mother's because of the special light pink slippers on her feet, but she couldn't figure out why her mom was lying on the floor. When Emily started walking towards the table, a man grabbed her from behind and put his hand over her mouth.

“Now the contract was only for your parents,” he leered at her, “but I’ll make an exception, just this once.”

She knew in her heart that if she didn’t fight, he was going to kill her. She kicked the man in his knees and bit the hand over her mouth. Hard. Hard enough to taste the salty, metallic tang of his blood. He yowled like a wounded cat and cradled his hand to his chest. While he was examining his wound, she pushed open the front door and ran. Emily ran as far as her legs could take her and then kept running. She ran blindly down an obscure alley that smelled of urine and rotten food and hid behind a dumpster. Her heart was pounding out of her chest, her breath rushed out in pants, and her mind was racing a mile a minute. She knew that if she wanted to survive, she needed to adapt. She needed to blend in. Never again would she be someone’s beloved child. That horrid man had killed her parents and was going to kill her as well. She could never go back home. Never.

Emily

“Cap! Quit daydreaming, we need to move,” my first mate, Ian, hissed at me, grabbing my arm and practically dragging me across the square. I was so lost in my memories, I hadn’t heard Will’s bird call telling us the guards were switching patrols. *Focus*, I scolded myself. We ran across the grassy expanse, crouched low to avoid detection. Will whistled low again, letting us know the guards were heading towards us. We made it to the garden and hid behind the tomato vines.

“Here’s our chance. Wait until the last turn and run for the doors,” I instructed Ian. The patrol marched to their positions, faced our hiding spot, then turned, turned again, and finally! Their backs were to us!

“Go, now!” I whispered to him. The two of us sprinted to the doors, throwing them open and easing them shut behind us. We stood with our backs against the doors, staring at the massive piles of Spanish doubloons in front of us. The arrogant fools didn’t even put a lock on the doors, no doubt assuming no one would be stupid enough to break into the treasury at the Royal Palace. *Well that’s their fault, I thought, because we are, indeed, stupid enough.* Ian walked to the window and gave the call, signaling the others to be ready. We filled four sacks with gold, threw open the doors, and I whistled, loud and clear, calling the guards’ attention. They turned, aiming their weapons, but by then the boys were on them. When all four guards were restrained, there was a quiet reunion and a not-so-quiet celebration after everyone saw the loot. Suddenly, we heard Will’s warning sound and everyone was running. Everyone but me.

I knew exactly who the warning was about. Captain Jack Sanderson of The Crusader in the Queen’s Royal Navy. He’d been quite the thorn in my side, albeit a handsome one. He kept trying to have me hanged, which was quite problematic, but just one look at the devil and I forgot what I was supposed to be mad about. However, I wasn’t ready to be captured yet, so I came prepared. I whipped out my disguise, put it on, and hid my regular clothes, including my beloved hat (a gift from the crew). I normally kept my hair tied back because it was easier if all the people hunting me down thought I was a boy, but I let it down. The soft curls bounced around my face and aided my disguise. Right in time, too! Jack ran towards me followed by twenty other soldiers. All of them looked rather nasty in their haste to capture and hang

me—well *other* me. After six years of living on the streets and ten years of being a pirate, it wasn't too hard for me to act like a damsel in distress. I had them eating out of my glove covered hand.

“Oh, thank goodness you're here!” I swooned and a few soldiers stepped forward like well-bred gentlemen, including a certain captain, to assist me.

“Are you alright?” Jack questioned and checked me over to make sure I wasn't wounded.

“I am now,” I purred, batting my eyes. “Oh, it was just terribly frightening. There were these pirates and they used me as a distraction to take out the guards and oh I do hope the guards will be alright. I couldn't help it, the pirates threatened me. I had to do what they said or they would have killed me!”

“Slow down, love, it's okay, no one blames you for what happened. It was that bloody Captain “M”,” Jack fumed, obviously angry that I... I mean *Captain M*, pulled one over on him— again. “Did you see which way they went?”

“No, I'm sorry. I was too scared to do anything except hide,” I confessed. *This is why women will always be able to manipulate men*, I thought to myself. *They're like putty in our hands*. An eye-bat here, a soft touch there, and suddenly I was the most innocent person alive and couldn't even hurt a fly. If only they knew.

“Thompson, Lewis, Mayburry, Nichols, you're in charge of the search. Take the rest of the men and search the surrounding area for any sign of the bloody pirates. I'll look after the witness,” Jack commanded.

Yes, please, I hummed to myself. Obviously I couldn't get involved with the man out for my head, but a little window shopping never hurt anyone.

“Could I escort you home, Miss...?” Jack questioned.

“Emily. Just Emily,” I simpered.

“Very well *just Emily*,” he joked. “Do you have someplace you would like to be dropped off?”

“I'm afraid I'm not from around here. They captured me while I was traveling to my Aunt and Uncle's villa in Cacao,” I responded, feigning regret.

“That's awful!” He exclaimed.

“And now I'm afraid someone awful will happen again,” I fretted, wringing my hands. *Man, I thought. If this pirating thing falls through, I could definitely have a career in acting.*

“Not to worry, love. You can stay with me until we can contact your relatives. My housekeeper would be delighted for the company,” he assured me.

“My many thanks,” I chirped, smirking to myself.

Into the belly of the beast, then.

“Now don't worry, dear,” Mami, Jack's housekeeper, crooned. “You're safe here.” She slid a plate of cookies and a glass of milk across the counter to me and patted my hand. I almost felt bad about having to sneak out later, but I had to get back to my ship.

“Thank you so much,” I said earnestly, surprised by the warmth and kindness she'd shown me.

“It's nothing, dearie,” she beamed. “Jack never has guests, so it's quite refreshing.”

“Out of the room for five seconds and you're already speaking ill of me?” He questioned jokingly, entering the kitchen and kissing Mami on her cheek. “How are you feeling?” He asked, his dreamy eyes searching my own. *Snap out of it!*

“Fine, thank you,” I murmured awkwardly, my earlier confidence gone in the presence of the lovely old housekeeper, who reminded me too much of my mother.

“Well, I'm just going to head up to bed,” Mami chirped, throwing a knowing smile in my direction. “I can't stay up late like you young people.” She tossed me a wink and headed up the stairs.

“So...” I drawled. “What do you know about Captain M?”

“About as much as anyone can know about a pirate,” he shrugged. “We know he's the captain of the Debby Drowner, which was formerly captained by Diego Montoya, though he hasn't been sighted in about six years. I wouldn't be surprised if M killed him to take over as captain.”

“Maybe he would surprise you,” I snapped. *Pull yourself together! Of course he thinks poorly of you, why else would he be trying so hard to have you hanged?*

“Is everything okay?” He asked, worriedly.

“Of course,” I reassured. “I think that today's events have just taken a toll on me. Perhaps I could be shown to my room now?”

“Oh, of course. I should've realized you'd be exhausted after today. I apologize for not showing you sooner,” he mumbled, embarrassed. “I'll escort you right away.” He offered me his arm and we began the journey up the stairs. “I apologize if I've said anything to upset you, I realize the topic of pirates can be distressing for a lady such as yourself.”

I'd offer him a shovel, but he seems to be digging the hole fine by himself. “I find the topic of pirates very interesting. I can't say I'd like to run into one again, but I'm not so delicate that the mere mention of one has me in a faint,” I replied with an undertone of snark and my nose in the air.

“Of course, I didn't mean to imply that you were delicate. It takes a very strong person to go through what you have. I fear I must apologize yet again, for my mouth has a tendency to work faster than my brain can think. I seem to be continually insulting you,” he blushed, bowing his head.

“No, really you haven't said a single thing extreme. I'm just overreacting. I promise I am not insulted,” I reassured him. He looked up and once again, I was the complete focus of those beautiful brown eyes. We froze in the hallway, just looking at each other. He opened his mouth to say who knows what, but I beat him to it. “Thank you for your hospitality. It is greatly appreciated.”

He closed his mouth, looking sheepish. “Not a problem, really. Here's your room, everything should be made and there's a private bathing room connected. Sleep well. Tomorrow we'll work on contacting your family.”

I waited a good three hours before I attempted to escape, just to be sure everyone was asleep. I was on the second floor, which put a twist in my plan, but luckily, Jack hired someone to take care of his landscaping and they decided to put a rose turret right by the window. With the window heaved open, all it took was a little balance on my part (and some indecent ankle

exposure) to climb down. I raced across his lawn, and ran out onto the street. Next, I just had to make it to the port and my beloved ship. Home.

Jack

She's gone. The bed is messed up, so obviously she was here for at least a while. What happened? Did someone take her? What if the pirates have her again? She could be in danger! I have to find her!

I was standing on the port watching as The Debby Drowner made her way in. It was three weeks after the incident with Miss Emily. I was searching, used all my contacts, scoured every clue, looking for any trace of where they had taken her. I caught up with the ship and I couldn't help wondering, *why am I doing this?* I figured I would do it for anyone in distress, but honestly, there was something special about her. She wasn't the typical lady, although she did play the part very well. She slipped sometimes and revealed her true character, one I surely wouldn't want to be on the bad side of. It felt like love at first sight. Before her, it was like I was drowning, and when I saw her, I could breathe again. It sounded ridiculous. *Back to the matter at hand, Jack.*

I watched as the pirates began unloading their loot into carriages and sending them off to who knows where. While they were all preoccupied, I snuck onto the ship in the cover of darkness and went searching for the dreaded Captain "M". I found his cabin and didn't hear any voices, so I entered. There, sitting in the chair, was the beautiful, mysterious (and slightly intoxicated) Emily.

“Emily!” I exclaimed, overjoyed to see her safe. “We need to get out of here while they’re preoccupied! Also, are you drunk?”

“Wait, what? How did you even find me?” Emily asked in amazement.

“It’s a very long story, but I promise I’ll tell you as soon as I get you out of here,” I promised. I grabbed her hand, pulled her out of the chair, and started dragging her out the door.

“Why are you resisting? I promise you, they’re not going to hurt you while I’m around. We need to leave.”

“I think we need to talk, Jack,” she mumbled, the alcohol clouding her eyes.

“Now? You really think we need to talk right here?” I argued, incredulously.

“I think that’d be a good idea, mate,” a voice grumbled from behind me. I turned quickly, shielding Emily behind me.

“Who are you?” I barked and sized up the guy in front of me.

“Ian, thank god you’re here,” Emily giggled. *What?* “I do believe Jack is confused. So am I. Why is the room spinning?”

“Emily, focus,” I ordered. “We need to get out of here!”

“Nope, nope, nope,” she babbled. “My ship needs its captain! What if something happens to my baby while I’m gone?”

“Your WHAT?” I choked out.

“My ship. She’s beautiful, isn’t she? And my crew, they need me too. Right Ian?” she worried and turned her doe eyes to the strange man, apparently named Ian.

“Right, love. It wouldn’t be the same without you,” Ian reassured her.

She smiled and relaxed a little. I, however, was still very much processing the information that had been thrown at me. *SHE'S CAPTAIN M? There's no way I can have her hanged now, she means too much to me! I'll just have to let her go then.*

“Emily, I love you. I know we’ve only just met, but it feels like I’ve known you forever. There are two choices that you can choose between and it will be entirely your decision,” I offered. “You can marry me and be Emily full-time or you can stay a pirate and I will swear to never tell anyone who you really are, or to ever hunt you down again. The decision is completely yours. So, what will it be?” I queried.

Emily

“I still can’t believe you asked me to decide while I was drunk. That was really very cruel of you,” I chided as I remembered the overwhelming feelings of confusion and uncertainty.

“Well, it got me the desired result,” Jack joked as he tucked in our two boys, Orlando and Johnny. “And that, kids, is the story of how I met your mother.”

Written by: *Cheyenne Jerrell*

Dear diary, I wake up and run to the bathroom, seriously sick to my stomach. I hear my phone alarm for school going off and I just keep throwing up. I holler for my mother to call the school and tell them I'm running late and as soon as my stomach settles I get ready to drive there. School goes by in a blur, it's never like this. As I pass my friends in the hall I can't concentrate and say hi and talk how I normally do. They ask if something's wrong and I don't reply. I go to the nurse throwing up again and she sends me home. I now have to call into work for the first time in months. I feel depressed. Grieving, that's what the doctors say. I barely eat, I stopped going to my club meetings, my friends probably miss me. My dad died, only a week ago. He was overseas with his military group. We miss him, all of us, Harmony, Bentley, Jonah, mom. Oh, my name is Ava Lynn, by the way. Jonah didn't know him well, he's only two. And Bentley seems to be handling it better, he's away at college right now, but he's coming back in a couple days. Harmony is handling it like I am which is very hard. It's not easy losing someone you care about and love that much. They say it gets better, but then the doctors told me I'm pregnant three weeks along. Yay me. I guess it's okay though. It could be so much worse. As I drift to sleep in the bathroom floor thinking about all that could go wrong, I faintly hear the phone ring. I wake up an hour later to Harmony banging on the door and screaming. As she's sobbing she tells me mom needs to see me right now, so I run down the stairs. Mom is sitting at the table crying, and tells me that she's been diagnosed with stage three cancer and it's developing fast. She has about a year left to live, we better make the most of it.

It's been a few weeks since dad's funeral and mom's bad news. Bentley came home, he's still home. School and work fill my days, I'm still grieving is what the doctors say. They tell me I have severe depression and anxiety, but they can't give me medicine for it until after to give birth to my baby girl. Oh, I'm having a girl. The doctor told me that she's healthy and growing good, she said "keep up the good work honey, you're going to be an amazing mother". This baby has become my reason to keep going, along with Harmony and Jonah. I've got to get another job or two, get more money to take care of all of us. It's going to be difficult. I've come to realize that being a parent is gonna be a lot of work, I still have after school clubs and fun things to do, but I've sort of lost all of my friends. I have a schedule now, get the kids to school and daycare, get to school, work, pick up the kids and go home. It's the same thing every day. But at least my brother is getting a job or two to help me, he is taking a break from college. He tells me that my mother and siblings health, and mine and my babies health are more important than grades at the moment, he would rather be here taking care of us while mom is still here. So I now have school, caring for my mother and sister and brother, two jobs, after school clubs, and taking care of myself and my unborn baby every single day, now with the help of my brother, Bentley.

Jonah needs a new babysitter while I am at school and work, and while Bentley is at work. We have to hire a babysitter, or put both Harmony and Jonah in daycare. It will help us when we can not watch them, but it also costs a lot. Money is tight right now. Jonah can now speak, he says our names, he calls out Harmony by saying "Har" and he says "Ava" for me, for Bentley he says "Ben" or "Bubba" he is getting so big. It has been about two months since Bentley quit school and came home to help us, they put my mother in the hospital for chemo. We go visit her sometimes, it is always sad. It is hard to keep my grades up and stay in my clubs, so I quit my

extra school activities. We have decided to put Jonah and Harmony in daycare, they love it. My baby is growing happy and healthy, we have quite a while until she comes out, but it seems to be going by so fast. I have decided to name her Emmalynna it is such a pretty name. Our bills are so expensive. How are we going to make it? Mom's hospital bills are getting higher and higher and more expensive. It is really starting to take a toll on Bentley and I. The doctor keeps telling me to calm down and take things slow, it isn't good for the baby, but how can I? How am I gonna give this baby the life it deserves? My emotions are everywhere, and I cry every night.

Just about a month until Emmalynna comes into our scary world, and I am both terrified and excited! I graduate in two weeks and i can start online college classes! That is what Bentley decided to do, take those online classes. He is doing pretty well, I only hope I can do as well as he is. Mom is still in the hospital her health is confused I guess, it keeps getting better, and then worse. I have to take off work, but I am allowed to continue in school to finish, I have to be pushed in a wheelchair to all of my classes and i cannot participate in activities though. It's boring. My baby is due so soon. So little time to get things set up for her, and Harmony and Jonah are growing up so fast, mom is missing so much, so we visit her a bunch in the hospital. In just one short month my beautiful baby girl will be here, I truly hope mother can hold on that long, for us all. I don't want her missing this, it's too big of a deal.

Bentley is rushing me to the hospital, I am going into labor, baby Emmalynna is on her way! I graduated two weekends ago and have been pretty much on bed rest since. She's had me in a bunch of pain. As we get into the hospital and they hook the things they need yo to me and prep me for giving birth, it finally sinks into my mind that I'm about to give birth to a baby! She is here within a few hours and they take her to clean her up and bring her back. She's beautiful. My heart has melted. As soon as I took one look at her I was in love. She is so tiny and cute, everybody wanted to hold her and love her. Mom's health keeps getting worse so they are sending her home with hospice, they say she only has days left so I am letting her spend time with Emmalynna whenever possible. I haven't been able to go back to work yet, I have been at home taking care of Emmalynna and the kids. The bills continuously pile up higher and higher, the need for groceries and clothes is getting more and more expensive and everyone is needing more because of the constant growing. Doctors appointments are a must, a very big must, and they are costing more and more by the day. It is honestly so difficult to stay happy and healthy with things going like they are. About a week after Emmalynna was born, and mom got to see her, mom passed. We all miss her, and none of are taking it well. Our normal routine has been messed up, along with all of the depression we all have, especially Harmony and Jonah. It isn't healthy for them, they are too young for this pain. I want to help them, but I don't know how.

So the good news is that my baby is happy and healthy and Harmony, and Jonah are starting to cheer up and act like themselves again. Some churches have been helping us with bills and things, groceries and much much more. It has only been a couple weeks since mom's death and burial. We still miss her so much. We can't bring her back, but if we could, we would. Heaven should be closer. Bentley and i are getting better as well, the depression in our house is

starting to fade and hide itself away. With all the things going wrong and making us hurt an unhappy, good things start too.

It has been about three months, maybe four. I am finally back to work, i have started my online college classes, my baby goes to daycare with Harmony and Jonah, they all love it so much. Our incomes are getting better and we are holding our house and all needed appliances and more up very well. Everything is starting to work. I Jonah is now in school, preschool, but school in the least. He loves it. Bentley has a new girlfriend, she seems to love us, and is always around, but i don't feel she will be here long. She's wonderful, but Bentley isn't ready, you can tell. My aunt and uncle have moved down here to help out with everything as well. They say that as soon as we pay off our house we can move into a bigger and better one kinda far away and start over, i don't know how the children will handle that, or how Bentley and i will, but we will find out. This past year has put me through so much, and i just want to let you know, it has all been worth it. Emmalynna, Harmony, Jonah, mom and Bentley are my life, now that mom is gone, i can pray to her and continue to ask her for help, knowing that in some way she will answer my prayers. She has always looked after us, now she will do it from heaven, she is up there with daddy now. I think i have pretty much became a mother to my siblings as well. They all look up to me, i have always been here. Mom couldn't stay with us and make sure they have a good life, so i will. They need me, at least for right now. I need them, too.

Emmalynna is five months old! She is getting so big! She is so precious. It's now summer, the kids are having so much fun. And Baby Em loves the heat, the playing, the attention, everything. Everything is working out somewhat perfectly now. Its an excitement overload. We are so much better than when we started. We have many good things going for us and the happiness won't stop. I guess you can say we are living happily ever after. My last entry in this diary. It ended on a good note. So here goes dear diary, please remind me of my accomplishments, and the accomplishments of my family for the rest of my life, so i will forever know that things will get better, no matter how bad they seem. Love, Ava Lynn.

By Hannah Wimberly

A short story

by

Abby Thompson

I could feel the old car vibrate beneath me. My thighs shook, and every once in awhile we'd hit a pothole and my knees would knock together, violently, as if they were two stones being carried in a pouch. The drive was almost silent, besides the slow Doors' song playing quietly from the dusty speakers. The view wasn't the most spectacular sight in the world. We had to be the only car on this two-laned road that seemed to go on for miles. If you tilted your head a bit and squinted, it almost looked like a stretch of gray pavement rose above the dirt and into the blue sky, where the heavenly gates awaited you. Contrary to popular belief, these heavenly gates were actually just puffy white clouds that I took advantage of with my imagination. You can decide for yourself what you want these clouds to be, but my mom says I need to be more optimistic these days. So, yeah: heavenly gates.

Bare, dry land was laid out on either side of us. The brown color of the dirt was mocking my eyes. The dirt seemed to mope and give the look of lifelessness. Nothing could grow there. Meanwhile, my whole life, I was told my brown eyes sparkled and could shed happiness on others. Now I know they were lying to me, because my eyes were the same shade of brown as this hopeless ground. Although, a spring green seemed to make a thin line around my pupil, informing me that my eyes were, in fact, hazel. But, personally, I find that's bullshit, because my

mother was gifted with a chestnut brown, and a gorgeous pop of green. This made her eyes look like a portal to tropical rainforest.

Speaking of green, I was disappointed to find out that there were no cacti in southern Nevada. Yes; maybe the ones that looked like little, spiky balls, but none that were tall and had two distinct branches that sort of looked like a man flexing. I had also yet to see one of those shrubby things that blow across the street. Commonly found between two cowboys about to duel. All that time watching old Clint Eastwood films with my grandfather when I was little was time wasted. Just *once* I wanted to hear, in a real life, knee-slappin', western situation, *This town ain't big enough for the two of us*.

My mom huffed as she flipped the sun-visor down and threw on her cheap sunglasses. The light was beating in through the windshield, landing perfectly on her blotchy, wrinkled face. Even with her glasses on, I could see her pretty eyes squinting from behind the lenses. She hadn't said a word to me since we left the house. I guess the letter my dad had sent her wasn't the most sincere message in the world. She had slapped my hand away when I had reached for it the day it came in the mail. She slapped it so uncaringly, her middle finger scraped the side of the tourmaline gemstone in my ring. The scrape was barely visible now.

"Go get your things," was all she said, after she had read the letter. Then she turned away from me, strolled into the garage, and I heard her start the car. I didn't bother reaching for the letter to read it, because I already had a fairly good idea of what it said.

It's been three hours since then. We passed the "Welcome to the Silver State" sign miles ago. We've stopped at two gas stations, once to fill the tank and once so I could pee (which was

filled with the monotonous groans of my mother, asking me why I didn't go when we got gas, and I informed her that it wasn't necessary at the time). We had to be close. Yet, I didn't see any military planes or flying saucers overhead. The notorious electric fence with a warning sign had yet to come into view, also.

Deciding my mom was too rigid to talk to at the moment, I sighed and curled farther into the stained front seat of my mother's ancient Nissan Altima. I pulled out my phone to check and see if any of my friends had replied to my goodbye messages yet. Instead, an email notification popped up on my lockscreen.

I already knew who it was. Who the hell emailed people anymore?

To: LaylaBrown505@gmail.com

From: CAPTMitchBrown@yahoo.com

My dearest, Layla, I am so excited for you to come live on base with me! I haven't seen you in so long! I know it's just for a few months, until your mother returns, but you will learn to love this place just as you did when you were a child. Don't worry, there are kids your age here too with their parents. They're putting purple bedsheets on your mattress as I type this. It'll feel just like home. See you soon! Love you!

Captain Mitchell H. Brown

I rolled my eyes at that last line and threw my phone into my lap. If he loved me so much, why hadn't he made an effort to come see me? I haven't seen the guy in...what...five, six years? I can barely remember what he looks like. I'm pretty sure he had dark brown hair with dark brown eyes, but that also could've been my fourth-grade teacher who had always seemed like a good father figure. In the back of my mind, though, I knew his absence could partly be blamed on my drug-addicted mother. She was the one, after all, who left him and took me with her. And, hell, who'd want to get back with her? I wasn't too eager to stay with her either.

As the Doors' song changed into something a little bit more upbeat (I'm 97% sure it was by Creedence Clearwater Revival, but I could be wrong), a fence appeared in the distance. It was tall and intimidating, with barbed wire wrapped around with top. Two large men wearing camouflage uniforms were standing at the entrance. As we got closer, I could see a gun was strapped onto each of their muscled torsos. And as we got even closer, their hands started to grip the holster. A massive jeep, in the same matching camo as the men, waited behind them.

My mom parked on the side of the road, a few feet away from the officers, as if they weren't going to drag me down into oblivion in the next few minutes. She took off her sunglasses and wiped the sweat off her forehead as one of the men started to come near the window. He knocked on the driver's side window with the butt of his gun, gesturing for her to roll it down. She complied and cranked the window down (I couldn't remember a time in my life where I'd been in a car that had those special automatic windows, except for the time I was at Anna Parker's thirteenth birthday party, and I'd received word that my mom had overdosed again, so Anna's rich dad had to drive me to the hospital in his shiny, new Buick).

“State your business, ma’am,” the man said, with a small southern accent. His nametag read *JOHNSON*. He had pale skin with freckles covering his entire face, and reddish-brown eyebrows. His dark brown eyes squinted when he looked into the car.

“I’m Candace Moore. I’m supposed to be dropping off Layla Brown, Captain Mitchell Brown’s daughter.”

Johnson eyed me, suspiciously. I wish I could’ve seen if his pupils were dilated, but his eyes were too dark to tell. He then reached to his belt and pulled out a small black device; to which the use, I was clueless. I quickly made sense of it, though, when he pushed the device passed my mother and towards me, and asked for a fingerprint.

I gave him a look that seemed to say *You’re kidding me, right?*, but his eyes said back to me *No, seriously, give me your finger.*

I hesitantly placed my pointer finger onto the small pad of the machine. It was black, but I could see thin green lines being shuffled across the screen to where I was supposed to place my finger. It gave me the impression that this item came straight out of a CIA office in Tokyo.

My finger was on there for exactly one Mississippi before it chimed. Quite a girly sound for such a badass tool, if you ask me. Johnson took the fingerprint-scanner away before I could see what it said. Apparently, though, it had good results because after he studied the screen, he looked back at me and said with a stern face, “Ms. Brown, please say your goodbyes and grab your things.” He walked away from the car and stood by the other officer near the jeep.

Not even an I.D? They sure put a lot of faith into that machine, I thought.

For the first time since we left the house, my mother spoke to me. “I took you away from this place for a reason, Layla,” she said gently, low and husky. “It wasn’t just for my benefit. The things you see here...you can’t unsee,” she told me, her pupils dilated.

I rolled my eyes at the pathetic, over-used line and huffed, “Mom, I don’t have time for this.” I almost giggled at what I had said, because now it seemed I had all the time in the world. I moved to grab the door-handle.

Before I could reach my freedom, one of her dry hands gripped my wrist tightly. The bits of some of her nail-beds, that were still left after constant biting, dug into my flesh. “Five months, Layla. No more, no less. I’ll be back to pick you up in this exact spot the morning of the New Year. They don’t allow phones or computers, so ask your dad to get in touch with me if you need anything. I love you.”

I grumbled back that I loved her too and yanked my wrist out of her iron-hold. I hopped out of the car and moved to the trunk she’d popped to grab the one suitcase I brought. It was packed to the brim, full with clothes, some girl products, a file of all the works I’d ever created (they were all on my computer, but since computers weren’t allowed, I had spent hours printing every single detailed conversation I had written down), my toothbrush, and a few of my favorite pens.

The other officer, *JAMIE*, an incredibly dark-skinned guy that had to be at least six foot six, took the suitcase from my hand and brought it towards the jeep. Johnson left towards the jeep too, so I was assuming I had to follow. I took one last look at the 1997 Altima. It had dents in the sides from shopping carts people had carelessly flung over pavement into the direction of

our vehicle. In the seats, there were crumbs from fast food we had eaten in the car for dinner and cereal I had taken in a baggy on the way to morning service. The radio didn't work either, which allowed mom to play her CDs she had burned with mostly rock music from the sixties and seventies. I really disliked the car and the memories associated with it. But every inch that was put in between us, it felt like a string was breaking.

As I made my way to the gigantic military vehicle, I heard the rocks beneath my mother's tires begin to crumble as she pulled away back onto the dusty pavement. I didn't bother to turn around. A swift brisk of wind ran into my path. The air was hot and dry, feeling like it had lacked moisture for years. But, finally, (probably the highlight of my day) a small shrub of weeds and grass blew across the dirt and over the tips of toes, and then away with the wind.

Cue that Western music.

Jamie jumped in the front seat next to a drop-dead gorgeous driver who had a deep skin-tone with a pitch black braid running down her right shoulder. Her hair was covering her nametag. Studying her further as I hopped in the backseat next to Johnson, I saw a long scar running down her cheek. I couldn't help but wonder if it happened because of an incident here.

"We good?" the girl asked them.

"Yep. We got to go through Security first, though," Johnson told her from the back.

"Figured," the girl said while pulling away from the road and into the opposite direction.

"Cap'n said the girl hadn't been here in years."

I loved how they were talking about me like I wasn't even here. And I'm not being sarcastic. I really didn't want to make conversation with these people who were about to take away my outlets to the outside world.

I looked down at my hands in my lap. They clutched my phone, white-knuckling. I realized it was ridiculous. *Oh, look, another millennial who can't be away from their phone.* But, I felt like they were going to strip me of everything. Strip me of myself. Of my sanity. At least, that's what my mom had said. One of the many things she had said about this place, and one of the few things I had bothered to listen to.

Before I zoned out completely, I looked out at the endless hills of defiant greenery and death. It resembled the inside of an old clock; coils that had bronzed over time to give the machinery a nice rust. Unmoving, unchanging. Time standing still.

I then noticed my wrist had two crescent moons dug into it.

Welcome to *A Simple Guide to Existing, Vol. 1*
By Mason LeMarr

A simple, easy guide to enjoy and love existing.

The first step to existing is to not think about how or why you exist, the more you think about it the more existential dread sets in and that's bad. You just exist, deal with it.

Now that you understand (rather, accept) that you exist, it's time to appreciate that you exist. Self love is important, but so is not being a narcissist. Nobody likes a narcissist but a narcissist, and that's only if that particular narcissist is themselves. Don't be a narcissist.

You like yourself, that's pretty dandy but now it's time to find companions. Could you skip liking yourself and move to this? Sure, but you'll feel emptier on the inside for it.

Companions are important to have, but the problem is that some people may or may not like being around others for too long, so it's important to find a close niche of people that you can tolerate for extended periods of time. This will be hard to do, but don't give up. Or do, it's okay to be a sad hermit.

(Note: an animal works just as well if not better sometimes. (Except cats, cats are those narcissists we talked about))

Once you have a friend or five, you can actually start having fun. Could you have fun without friends and love of yourself? Sure, but that fun will probably come from drugs, and drugs don't really help that empty feeling inside and the sooner you learn that the later you die from an overdose. Now, some things you can do with friends are:

- Playing videos games
- Wrestling
- Partying
- Not doing drugs
- Watching a sports game
- Etc.

Those are just a few of an infinite possibility of things you can do with your friends, but don't think about the infinite amount of choices or else you might start questioning existence and, as we determined, that's a bad thing.

Speaking of bad things, the last step in this volume is love. Love, like taking out the dog, is completely optional. You might feel a longing for wanting more than just a friend, and that's terrific.

Good on you.

The problem is that, with 7 billion people in the world today, there's a lot of options for a mate. And, while that can be great, it also makes you question if you'll ever find her in time before your death. Chances are you won't, but it's alright if you settle. Everyone else does.

Thank you for reading *A Simple Guide to Existing, Vol. 1*

Tune in next time when I tell you why it's a bad idea to think about the billions of conscious people alive right now thinking and existing at the same time as you.

Captain Tory

As the night emerged, the little boy, Charles, walked through the dark, misty streets of Rhode Island. The rain covered the cobblestone streets and his feet splashed in the muddy puddle, created from the storm. Silence engulfed the city, not a sound was heard besides his footsteps. Nobody dared to walk through the streets tonight because a murder was committed just hours before.

All of a sudden, a glow appeared through the thick fog. Curiously, he heavily walked towards the light. As he approached it, he could slowly make out a figure of a man. The boy saw an old, rickety man, with a black, bushy beard. He was wearing an ascot cap and a shabby trench coat. It appeared that the man had a worried look on his face.

“Are you lost, little boy?”

“I’m trying to find my way home. Who are you, sir?” the boy asked shyly.

“Captain Tory.”

“Well, Captain, can you help me get home? I’d really like to go see my parents.”

Charles pointed in the general direction of his house and the two headed on their way. Throughout their walk, he chatted nonstop about his day.

“I left my house because my family had a rough time supporting us. They barely made enough money for food on the table. I got a job to deliver newspapers from Mr. Herald. I made about ten dollars, enough to feed my family for five days.”

The man didn’t respond and continued their walk in silence through the streets. They approached a house with many patches on the roof and boarded up windows. The color was

cracked off the house, showing signs of poverty. The young boy knocked on the door a couple of times and peaked through a hole on the side of the house. They heard yelling and fighting throughout the household.

“Do you not hear the door, get it June!”

“I do everything around here Harry! Why don’t you get up and do something instead of getting fired every week? You’re the reason Charles feels guilty about staying here.”

Harry’s face flushed with shame. The young boy looked up at the old man with dreary eyes.

With a heavy heart, Charles whispered, “My mom always argues with my dad about how he can never keep a job to help the family out.”

Charles knocked on the rickety door again. The door violently swung open and he stood there looking up at his mom who was standing in the doorway.

“Mom!” the boy smiled widely.

“Harry, there is no one out here!”

“It’s me, Charles, I’m back!”

“You’re out of your mind, witch,” exclaimed Harry.

His parents went back inside and started to argue once again. The boy tilted his head and stared up at Captain Tory, wondering what just occurred.

“I have something I need to show you.”

Following his lantern, the boy had to run to keep up with him. They wandered through each street, finally reaching the middle of town.

“Why are we at the Town Square?”

Charles looked at the humongous crowd murmuring to each other while standing in a circle. He slowly approached the large group and peaked through two men. There, he saw a body laying on the ground. The satchel on the body was just like his own, he looked down and realized the money he earned for his family was missing. With a blank expression, Charles finally registered that the body was his own.

At a rapid speed, the events flashed before his eyes. *Charles was returning home after he made a few extra dollars for his family to live off of. He heard a noise in the distance and began to run in fear. All of a sudden, he was grabbed by a mob of local drunks and was viciously thrown to the ground. One of them reached for his satchel while the others held him by his scrawny arms. Charles tried to fight them even when he knew it was impossible to fight against the four towering men who were overwhelmingly strong. Once they had taken his money, they continued to beat him until he was unconscious.*

Charles glanced up at Captain Tory with despair. Following his lantern, they trudged in the dark until they reached the bay. He swung his lantern three times and slowly the schooner appeared. Once the schooner moved closer to the bank, he saw many children laughing and playing without any guilt or worries. He timidly walked onto the boat, and the children were delighted to see him. They greeted him with smiles like glimpses of heaven, and for once in his life, he felt at home. Each one of their souls were free at last. The schooner slowly disappeared in the moonlight with only one glowing light, the lantern.

Real

By

Cynthia Bailey and Elena Smith

It was a rundown house with a red painted door, and one story with a front porch swing made of sanded wood. Weeds grew near the steps, and ivy climbed the brick chimney. Stanley stood before it proudly, a grin plastered on his face. Even though a spruce tree grew crooked and ugly in his new front lawn, Stanley loved every little detail.

The man beside him spat tobacco onto the ground and grunted, “Everythin’ ya lookin’ for?”

Stanley turned to the gnarly-kneed man with his mountain man beard, weathered cap, and faded button-up.

“Yes Mr. Strickler, your father’s place is just,” he lifted his arms above his head, “perfect.”

Mr. Strickler grunted again and rasped, “Yeah. Well. here are your keys,” he plopped two keys in Stanley’s hand and shuffled away, scratching his scraggly beard.

Stanley watched the man lumber to his rusted blue truck and sputter down the road, diesel spitting from his tailpipe. Stanley practically flew to his new house, luggage in tow. Life was just perfect.

Over the next two days, Stanley whistled as he worked on cleaning up and settling into the house. He swept the wooden floors, scrubbing the dirt from the windows and washed clothes and sheets. He had barely any possessions, moving from a tiny apartment overlooking central park to a small house on an old dirt road. Stanley’s smartphone buzzed and began to ring as he

was scrubbing the bathroom tiles, his soap brown. Stanley jumped, slipping a yellow glove off to sit back on his rear, crossing his legs and slipped his phone from his shirt pocket.

“Hello, Stanley Price here,” he chirped.

“Stanley-pie is that you?” an old woman’s voice crooned gently.

Stanley smiled, “Hi momma, how are you?”

His mother giggled, “Oh, I’m just peachy. How’s the new place?”

Stanley chewed on his nail, staring at the grimy floor and bathtub and sighed, “It’s coming together. As to why they moved an accountant out here in the middle of Minnesota’s wilds, I’ll never know.”

Stanley’s mother tittered, “Oh, those big executives always have a reason.” She spoke under her breath, unknowing that Stanley heard, “Not ever a very good reason, though.”

Stanley chuckled at his mother’s pouting words, “Well, I’m currently cleaning up the bathroom, I plan to remodel a little bit, but it will all have to wait until after I get settled in town.”

“That’s nice dear. Oh! My shows on, gotta go! Lots of smooches!” With a click, Stanley was left alone. He shrugged and stood up, shuffling to the kitchen.

As he was just starting to make himself a chicken salad, he heard a strange scratching noise. Stanley stilled, his hand hovering over the loaf of bread.

“Great,” he muttered, slapping his butter knife down. “Mice.”

Stanley edged into the hallway, craning his neck to figure out which way the mice were scampering. To the right, the noise was louder. Stanley growled in annoyance and marched down

the hallway but stopped in his tracks and turned his green eyes toward the angled door under the staircase. The noise came from the basement, the one room he hadn't been in yet.

Stanley gulped and peered at the round doorknob. He hated basements. Steeling his nerves, Stanley eased the door open, gripping the knob tightly. The basement was dim, only one square window gave murky light. At the base of the short steps was a rolled up rug, an old-fashioned ice skate on a hook, a shelf of paint cans and old preserve jars, a little door...

A little door?

Stanley stared in bewilderment, "What the -"

The rest of his outburst was cut short as the round wooden door began to rattle. Stanley's breathing hitched. He scrambled for the fire poker against the wall and trembling, edged down the rickety steps. The little door rattled and thumped. The door knob turned slowly.

Stanley raised the poker, heart racing, hands trembling, and teeth clacking. The door swung open.

A tiny person filled the doorway.

Stanley screamed and slipped, falling down the stairs, landing hard on his back against the concrete floor.

He groaned and squinted, a small figure leaning over him.

The small figure was a squat man with an untamed mane of thunder-cloud hair, a matching full beard with streaks of ginger braided with beads. His eyebrows were bushy caterpillars furrowing above squinted green eyes. His bulbous nose twitched in annoyance; the mole under his glaring right eye jumped.

The small man leaned back up and crossed his beefy arms and spoke in a gravelly irish accent, “Wut in land’s keep kinda slimeball are yu’? Screamin’ like me nanner’s ghost and disturbin’ Ragnar’s work!”

Stanley blinked, then everything went black.

Stanley’s head was pounding, swimming with murky sounds muffled in his mind. Slowly, Stanley blinked his eyes open and found himself laying in his bedroom. Shaking himself awake, he groaned. A bad idea, his head was still pounding.

“Lookie at sunshine comin’ to,” a gravelly voice spoke from the bedroom door.

Stanley snapped his eyes to the voice and saw the strange little man leaning against the door, shining a rock. Stanley felt faint again, but he swallowed the feeling.

“What... are you? Are you... a leprechaun?” Stanley stammered.

The little man froze and slowly turned his glaring emerald eyes to Stanley. He spoke slowly and dangerously calm, “If ye go about callin’ me one of those snot rags, cheap-shot drunks, I’ll bury you deeper than hellfire.”

Stanley felt cold sweat and chills rack his body. He nodded numbly.

The little man’s eyes flicked back to his rock, at ease again. “No laddy, I’m no cheap-shot, grubby-fingered twitter. Me kind’s a dvergr, or to your kind, a dwarf. Ragnar’s me name, and this is me home under your clomping feet.”

Stanley was in shock, “Dwarves aren’t real...” His voice sounded small and weak.

“I’m standin’ before ye peepers ain’t I?” Ragnar spread his arms and wavered like a hologram. In a snap he disappeared.

“And,” Ragnar’s voice growled by Stanley’s ear.” I’m the keeper of all under the earth and where ye call your home.”

Stanley gulped. This dwarf was real.

Eloise and her cuddly

By Ashtyn Williams

She looked up as the afternoon sun bounced off of the leaves, hitting and exposing the specks of dust in the air. Her long, blonde flower-filled curls lay across the grass around her, as Cuddles, her stuffed best friend, lie inanimately next to her. His black button eyes stared into the sky. The warm, earthy air swirled around the two, lightly blowing the leaves and grass in a hypnotic manner. The only sound was that of the leaves as they swished against each other. Everything was calm, fairytale like.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

The ground shook under the two, causing her to shoot up from her spot on the grass.

“What in the world...”, she questioned, as she began to turn in circles, taking in her surroundings. Feeling a light tug at the bottom of her lavender dress, she looked down at her bare feet to see Cuddles standing and pointing. Following his fluffy little finger, she gazed up into the sky. Flocks of black birds flew from their homes in the trees with each rumble of the ground.

Harder bounces of her hem alarmed her. She looked down as Cuddles was using all of his might, pulling and tugging, to convince her to move her feet.

“Okay. Okay,” she confessed as they joined hands and began to run. Looking back over her shoulder as they hopped over logs and dodged branches, she saw a figure over the top of the trees.

Dropping Cuddles paw, she stopped dead in her tracks. The girl looked up and down at the giant human existing in front of her. She had never seen anything like him in her life. Rage was plastered on his enormous face. He wore tan leather pants and a tattered shirt to match. The

man flashed his yellow teeth in a snarl, causing her to grasp Cuddles paw and continue onward. Leaping and lunging, Cuddles led her through the forest. “Where in the world did he come from?” she gasped. Cuddles didn’t reply.

As they ran and ran, the roaring sound of water fled the air. With every step they took it kept getting louder and louder.

“Oh no. Oh no. Oh no,” she cried as a raging river blocked their path. “Cuddles, we’re done for.” She plopped down on a nearby rock, buried her hands in her golden curls and began to cry.

Boom, boom, crunch, came the sound of huge feet rattling the ground and smashing trees.

“We aren't going to be able to cross this river. There is no use in trying. I wish we were home, having a tea party instead of...” She continued to ramble on and cry until she hear a swoosh of air. Looking up, she saw Cuddles across the river and a vine swinging back her way.

Gripping the vine between her small, dainty hands, she looked across to see Cuddles, standing there, waiting.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

She looked back and saw the top of the giants head above the trees. Bending down and then jumping with all of her might, she flung herself across across the river. She kept her eyes on Cuddles the entire time. He calmly stood there and watched her. Her feet planted firmly on the ground seconds after she let go of the vine. Cuddles reached out his paw for her to grasp and then they were off, the giant trailing close behind.

Effortlessly, the giant hopped over the river like it was a tiny stream and continued strolling along. The impact of the giants hop caused the pair to lose balance, causing the young

girl to fall to her knees. Tiny drops of red flowed from the scrapes on her leg. Tears and muffled cries began to escape from the girl. Cuddles crawled through the grass as his girl followed. Once they got to a safe, covered spot under a bush, Cuddles cover his girl's mouth with his soft paw, in hopes to say hidden from their pursuer.

“Why is he following us?” whispered the child. Cuddles continued to sit there quietly as the sound of gigantic footsteps surrounded them. After awhile everything went quiet, except the birds in the distance singing to each other. “I think he is gone,” murmured the girl. Cuddles raised his right paw out in front of him as he listened with concentration.

The young girl peaked out of the leaves on the bush. Leaning out more, she tried to get a better look. Cuddles, aware of something, pulled on her big toe, hoping she'd crawl back into the safety of the bush.

“I want to go home, Cuddles,” she snapped. “I'm scared and I would just like to go home.”

Now out of the bush, she stood to stretch her legs, Rhythmic gusts of air blew her hair from her back over her shoulders to her chest. Bumps appeared up and down her arms and a chill shot down the middle of back. She spun around in horror.

There, the giant man sat. He was leaned up against a tall oak tree asleep. Hands covering her mouth, she looked back at Cuddles for guidance, except, he wasn't there. Darting all around, her eyes looked for a glimpse of his tan fur.

How could he leave me! What am I supposed to do now? How do I get away without waking him? If somehow I do, I don't know the way home.

Thoughts of panic rushed through her mind as she maintained her posture in front of the giant. Her mouth was covered with her hands in hopes to muffle her heaving breathing. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a blur of tan. Cuddles motioned her to come over to where he was standing. A sign of relief wanted to escape from her lips, but couldn't because of the pressure from her hands. Tiptoeing, she started making her way to her best friend. Her eyes were fixed on Cuddles and with every step she took, tiny bits of relief rushed into her body.

She took her last step toward Cuddles and--

Snap.

The two gazed down at her bare foot to see a twig snapped in two. Slowly, they turned their heads to look at the giant. His eyes were open wide and his face red. The girl could almost see the steam coming from his mouth and nose. In seconds they were racing through the forest again.

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!" she gasped between breaths. This time the giant was close on their heels. The ground became more unstable with every step of the giant.

Suddenly the girl and Cuddles skid to a stop, kicking pebbles down into the ravine below and the giant gaining ground. Reaching out his paw, Cuddles look up at the girl and gave her an assuring nod.

1... 2... 3... Jump!

Gasping for air, the panicking girl shot out of bed, the covers pooling around her feet. There she was, in her room, chest rising and falling like waves hitting the shore.

Cuddles?

Everything came rushing back to her. Digging through the pile of linen, she searched for her best friend. He wasn't there. She ran to the other side of the bed. There lay the limp, stuffed animal.

Grabbing his paw, she crawled back into bed. As she pulled the covers to her chin, she let out a sweet sigh of relief, and pulled Cuddles close to her chest. Closing her eyes, she drifted back to sleep.